A Knack for Monsters

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1658156.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom, Franklyn Froideveaux, Beverly Katz, Abigail Hobbs, Bedelia Du Maurier
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Omega!will, Alpha!hannibal, Slow Burn, Knotting, Biting, D/s, Cannibalism, Murder, Mating Cycles/In Heat, Slow Build, Wordcount: Over 50.000
Language:	English
Collections:	Hannigram Bonanza, *chef's kisses*, Murder_husbands
Stats:	Published: 2014-05-19 Completed: 2014-06-29 Words: 66,651 Chapters: 44/44

A Knack for Monsters

by Sugarmouse

Summary

Will has enough problems dealing with his bad dreams and the fallout of old cases. He does not need new nightmares, he does not need yet another alpha thinking they can run his life. This new alpha though, he's different. Perhaps they could become friendly, maybe one day even become *friends*.

This is canon divergence from the pilot, how things might have gone differently if Will was an angry omega and Hannibal an intrigued alpha.

Notes

Notes:
This is my first time writing a long fic in a long time. The fic is fully written in a rough format and I will be posting as it's edited and seen to by my betas. I'm hoping to post very frequently but that will depend on factors outside of my control I'm afraid!

Many thanks to my amazing betas. swiggity-swag-the-hannibal-stag/FatalGrace for starting this journey with me even when I was super nervous and unsure where it was going and you were super busy and Thanks you guys!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Chapter 1

"Interpret the evidence," says Will as he faces the screen. The dead woman's eyes stare out of the projected image, and Will practically feels the students' eyes on his back. He hears the quiet scratch of pen on paper, the clicking of laptop keys. He turns, leans on the lectern and bows his head, ostensibly to look at his notes.

"He shot Mister Marlowe first...." Will trails off, trying for some audience participation, and he waits for a student to call out a guess. He sighs into the silence; he's used to this. He can tell when it isn't going to happen. "He shoots Mister Marlowe with near surgical precision, then he goes for Missus Marlowe, his omega. It's a single shot that doesn't kill her, but instead, leaves her alive, forcing her to see what's happening. This killer wanted to *watch* the alpha die through his omega's face; he wanted to see their bond destroyed before she died." There's a quiet murmur that travels through the students in the room. By this stage of the semester, the real troublemakers are gone. The alpha students and the odd beta who refused to listen to a lowly omega, to take "no" for an answer. That doesn't mean the rest of the class respects him, but they're at least willing to listen to his lectures. He knows they'll still go over his head to complain about him when they don't like their end of term grades.

Will senses the alpha in the doorway, a quick sidelong glance confirming what his nose tells him. "I want you all to review the crime scene reports. Be ready to discuss exactly how I came to my conclusions about the killer," Will calls out, gripping the lectern and looking down at his book. He hears rather than sees his class gather their things and file out.

Jack Crawford looms over him, standing too close for comfort before the last of the trainees have left. "Jack Crawford," the man states, forcing Will to glance briefly up to acknowledge him. Crawford's arms are folded, and he towers over Will. At least it feels like he does. He's not actually much taller, but his pose screams out that he believes himself to be and Will is too weary to correct him. It's a classic alpha power play anyway. Predictable, and rather telling of Crawford's opinion on omegas.

"We've met," states Will simply. He knows Crawford remembers him; he's the only omega on the faculty. The night they had met, Will had been the only unattached omega there, pressured into attendance by Alana. He knows he would have stood out. Will had met Crawford's mate, and was forced to exchange awkward pleasantries with her and the other omegas until he managed to slip out of Alana's view and go home. Crawford's feigned forgetfulness is just another way for Crawford to attempt to dominate him. Stupid insecure alphas. "I take it you need my professional opinion on a case?"

"Eight separate alphas reported eight omega girls missing, all abducted from Minnesota within the last eight months."

"I thought it was seven," says Will, cogs already turning in his mind. He ignores Crawford's predictable wording, focusing not on the missing omegas but on the loss their alphas must feel instead. "Eight now and you come to me, why not Heimlich or Bloom?" Eight missing omegas. That means angry mates or worried parents breathing down the Bureau's collective

neck. Things like that make for bad press. So why would Crawford come to him? The supposedly unstable omega investigator on the case doesn't make for good press either.

Crawford smiles--that condescending smirk that alphas seem to save just for omegas. "You have a…*special* way of thinking about things." Crawford's tone implies that he thinks he's paying Will a compliment. He's not, of course.Since he became Head of Behavioral Sciences, Crawford hasn't legitimately complimented any of Will's work.

"The girls--they were all unmated, just shy of mating age, and taken from their alpha parent." Will clenches his jaw; reminds himself to keep calm and not say anything stupid, not argue that the omega parent is suffering from the same loss and is just as distraught. Not that Crawford would find it possible to empathise with an omega. Will wants to point out that it's not his ability to empathise with the omega victims that Crawford wants, it's his ability to get inside others' minds. Will has been doing this long enough to know what the higher up opinion of him is. He's just some crazy omega who can tell them what an omega victim might have thought before they died. No matter how many cases he has a hand in solving, the label "omega" still comes first. He should be used to it by now but he just refuses to allow himself grow accustomed to the unfairness of it all.

Crawford keeps talking, telling Will details about the case, reiterating again and again that he expects Will to try extra hard on this one, as though he needs reminding. Will finds the small talk--or whatever this is--tedious. He wishes Crawford would just hand him the files and leave him alone. Instead, he has to listen to Crawford talk over everything Will tries to say. As far as Will is concerned, Crawford's words aren't important anymore, and the conversation is just a calculated show of dominance. Will knows the dance; he's had to deal with plenty of alphas trying to put him in his place. It doesn't do them any good. Will has spent years building up defences to this sort of attack and it's not easy, but he withstands it. He stands and listens and avoids the alpha's steady stare lest he fall into some instinctual reaction outside of his conscious control. Eventually, Will stops trying to talk. He hopes that if he allows Crawford to vent, the alpha will eventually get bored and come to the point.

Will is momentarily lost in thought, wondering what Alana will say when he asks her about Crawford coming his way, when Crawford's hand comes up and pushes Will's glasses up the bridge of his nose. Will's instincts kick in, full force, and Will looks up into the alpha's eyes, freezing in place, breath catching, muscles throughout his body going taut. It takes him a beat too long to shake it off and look away, to mentally scold himself for reacting to the obvious play.

"Why aren't you bonded?" It's the kind of deeply personal question no one would dare ask an unattached alpha--but an omega's personal life is apparently public property. Will clenches his jaw, forces his eyes as close to Crawford's eyeline as he can bear and gives his best death-glare to the alpha's nose. Crawford smirks back and Will would like nothing better than to wipe that stupid smile off the man's face.

"I don't think that's an appropriate question," says Will through clenched teeth. "My private life is not your concern."

"It is if you're working for me," says Jack, "...not that you're my first choice."

Crawford must need him in some capacity, despite the put down, he's been obvious about that. They'd ask someone else first, they always do, to give the impression that he's their last resort. Will wonders for a moment if Alana might know anything about Crawford's intentions. But Will is certain enough that Crawford is like any other alpha, simple minded with the belief that everyone else is below him, seeing the inferiority everywhere. Crawford needs Will but the last thing he could do is let anyone know that's the case. It's probably simply a matter of someone else being too busy or unable to figure it out and a passing suggestion that he let Will have a go at it. "I'd have to agree to consult first," says Will, as calmly as he can, a slight waver in his voice the only clue to how tense he really is.*Crawford needs him on this case*, Will tells himself. He just needs to remember that.

"Not much of a choice in that, it's part of your contract," says Crawford with a smug grin. "It's been quite a while since you worked an active case in the field." Indeed it has been, thinks Will. But he had his reasons--maintaining his sanity, mostly. It's so much harder for him to deal with his demons while bearing the label of "crazy, unstable, unmated, heat-delirious omega". "You're coming with me to look at the case," says Crawford firmly. "You can talk to the parents of omega number eight."

It's not a question, it's the statement of an alpha so secure in himself that he just *knows* no omega would dare to argue with him, tell him no. Will has the urge to be that omega, to say no just for the hell of it. He wants to argue Crawford down and point out that consultations are, in theory, meant to be a voluntary arrangement, even if consulting is part of his contract. He wants to wrench any control he can back; he wants to do what little he can to protect himself. But he can't. He won't, not when he knows there's so much more at stake.

He can't let himself care, can't argue over the injustice of it all, can't rant against Crawford's attitude and the way he marches into the room and turns Will's class upside down and jars Will's nerves. He can't do any of those things, because there's something far more important than the angry alphas calling Crawford's office about their missing omega girls. Something more important than Crawford's anger over the unsolved case and the indignity of being forced to request assistance from an omega. There's something that's even more important than avoiding the new nightmares that will surely plague him if he touches the darkness again.Someone needs to care about those omegas, needs to remember that *they* are the most important ones here.

*****

For years, Will has suffered through intrusive questions and sneers and never ending comments about his lack of a bond. The subtle needling has been going on for so long that Will really should be used to it, but he doesn't think he ever will be. He's pretty sure the day he just accepts it will be the end; he might as well kill himself right then and there. Crawford's bluster is just the sign of another alpha in a long line of people who've underestimated him

They arrive at the latest missing girl's house and meet her worried parents. The way Elise's alpha mother eyes him makes Will uncomfortable, a mourning mother whose instincts still win out, every time. Her mate quivers and hides from them, eyes red from crying over his missing daughter. Classic signs of an omega burdened by an over protective alpha, Will

reasons. He ignores the parents and instead, focuses on the evidence. He does what he always does, he follows the evidence. He wants to know Elise Nichols so that he can know her kidnapper. He goes to her bedroom. Crawford wants to focus on where she was taken, try to track her down that way but he surprisingly relents when Will says he *needs* to know her better. He probably thinks he's focusing on Elise but Will's mind is preoccupied with her kidnapper.

Will goes into Elise Nichols' room and there she is, waiting for him. She's lying there dead and he mentally corrects the words in his head, he'll need to understand her *murderer* now instead. Will should feel vindicated but he hears the sobs of the girl's father from the other room and he has to throw himself headlong into the evidence to cope.

Will sinks into the killer's mind, syncs them both up and becomes one with their mind, feels as this person, this monster, must have, the emotions and thoughts running through Will's head. A small part of him enjoys it, forgetting about how stupid his life seems, how ridiculous the constant fighting just to exist is, getting to become someone else, someone with the kind of power that so many take for granted. He's shocked by Beverly Katz's approach, startled out of the moment by her confrontation; and his instincts kick in hard and he cringes away from her. He feels foolish when he looks at her, sees the thoughtful look on her face as she takes him in. She smiles apologetically as he meets her gaze.

"So you're Will Graham. I read the paper you submitted on time of death by insect activity," she says, examining him intently. "If I'd been involved in selection that year, I would have accepted it." Will grimaces. His consistent failure at academic achievement isn't particularly something he wants to think about at the moment. "You know, I heard you were an omega but it's hard to believe until you smell it for yourself." Will grits his teeth, his impression of the beta shifting considerably at the comment.

"You're not supposed to be in here," he snaps. It's a little easier to stand up to betas, once you remember their lack of pheromone control. He sidesteps her to get nearer to the body, to focus on what he's really here for. "I need to be alone." Beverly doesn't move, just stands there like she's not taking him seriously and she's probably not. After all, he's just an omega. She might only be a beta but she's still a few notches above him on the totem pole. Everyone is.

"Jeez whatever, relax," she says with a sigh, turning to leave, "I'll just report to Jack then." She mutters something that Will thinks might have been about him needing a knot. Will is sure he hears it but he's too tired to snap after her, to call her out on it and point out that he is *far* more than what she's giving him credit for. It all makes him more determined to solve this crime, to come up with something that's going to result in catching the monster who killed the girl lying on the bed.

Will is close to being overwhelmed between trying to deal with the way Crawford has been looking at him and trying to cope with the team of beta techs who come in to gather evidence. Beverly must have said something to the others because they mercifully leave him alone. He's thankful for that, even as he scolds himself for being so pathetic.

He looks at the scene and turns the evidence around in his head, over and over, twisting it and winding it and unwinding it and trying to view it from every angle and in every order.

Something is bound to fit together if only he looks at it just right, it's only a matter of time before the pieces fit. It always is.

Crawford yells at his subordinates, oozing alpha pheromones so heavily the air feels thick with dominance and it makes Will feel light headed. Sometimes Will idly hopes that one day there'll be some wondrous medical breakthrough and omegas could be free of these sensations, but the logical part of him always points out that for someone to supply that, there'd have to be a demand, and no alpha would allow them to demand it.

Crawford seems almost suspicious of him, Will can read it all over the intimidating alpha, can practically feel his sneering gaze, sizing Will up, looking for every weakness. It's probably what leads Crawford to suggest he see someone. Will practically laughs when he realises what Crawford is saying. Despite what Crawford thinks, despite what Crawford *wants*, he doesn't control every non-alpha. Will shrugs it off.

*****

The profile starts to come together over the course of hours, days, as more evidence is gathered. Beverly Katz is at least nice enough to give him her report about Elise Nichols' body directly. Perhaps she knows he doesn't want to go to Crawford for everything, and at least she keeps her comments about his omega nature out of earshot now. Perhaps she's seen the way Crawford acts to Will's face: all puffed up alpha with an ego to match.

Will finds himself sinking back into the killer as if he has no control over the process. Perhaps he doesn't. He doesn't have a choice, he has to catch this person. He needs to know, needs to *stop* the alpha who's doing it. He's sure it's an alpha, it seems it almost always is.

With the killer's mind comes the nightmares and Will is taken back to darker times. It's familiar in a terrible way, a way he wishes it wasn't. It's worth it though, he tells himself over and over as he wakes dripping with sweat in the middle of the night. It *will* be worth it when he stops the alpha who's doing this to those poor omegas.

Yet the nightmares, the dark thoughts that creep in from nowhere, that seem to sneak around the recesses of his mind even when waking, --they're not enough to tell him who the killer is, there's still something missing. Elise Nichols haunts him; her body hung on antlers, lifeless and gone and just another soon to be forgotten omega victim. It haunts him. There are pieces of the puzzle that he can't see and it's only a matter of time before victim number nine is reported missing, only a matter of time until Will starts blaming himself for not catching her killer sooner.

He can feel the love the killer has for their victims, an arrogant alpha understanding of love. He can feel it and he knows that the murders must all be about one girl. Will has it all figured out and yet he doesn't, not at all. There are just far too many pieces missing. He's reported his thoughts, given what he can of the profile but he can tell that Crawford isn't buying it, won't buy it, not until Will has actually *caught* this one.

The darkness of his dreams bleeds into everything around him and Will wonders if it wouldn't have been better to call Crawford's bluff and quit. But then where would he go? It's not as though there are many teaching jobs for omegas out there. If he hadn't proved himself

on other cases he'd be out of luck--expected to go sell himself to an alpha and give up his independence. On top of it all, he's put so much into this, worked too hard fighting against people trying to make his choices for him. No. He needs to solve this case, save the future victims, and show Crawford just how wrong he is. If only the evidence, his mind, the killer's mind would all line up, if only he could figure this one out before it's too late.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> The response to the beginning of this fic is more than I could have ever dreamed! Thank you all for you kind comments/kudos/messages. You are amazing!
>
> As before, this is my first time writing a long fic in a long time. The fic is fully written in a rough format and I will be posting as it's edited and seen to by my betas. I'm hoping to post very frequently but that will depend on factors outside of my control I'm afraid!
>
> Many thanks to my amazing betas. swiggity-swag-the-hannibal-stag/FatalGrace.
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

The whining of the beta in front of him prompts Hannibal to fantasize instead. He thinks about slicing into flesh, sliding the scalpel slowly, watching blood well up, hearing the beta scream. The liver, or kidney, or perhaps there's tender meat under the layer of fat along the beta's stomach. Hannibal's attention is brought back to Franklyn's snivelling and he passes the box of tissues across the gap between them, holding his body as far away from the pathetic man as he can. He'd kill him if it wouldn't be so suspicious, and considering Franklyn's obvious crush, he'd probably be too excited about Hannibal's attention to even be appropriately horrified before he died. Hannibal watches Franklyn pile the crumpled tissue onto the glass end table but keeps his features neutral, no need to give the beta any more fuel for his delusions.

"I just feel so pathetic," says Franklyn with a sniff. He wipes at his eyes and then looks up at Hannibal from under his eyelashes and shrugs his shoulders. "I mean, I guess I just have a thing for the strong alpha type."

"Interesting," says Hannibal calmly. It's not, it really isn't. Franklyn has a typical case of alpha infatuation, probably caused by being the unwanted beta child of an alpha who walked out on him. It's all textbook and frightfully dull.

"I, I guess I just want what I see on tv, you know, I see all these happy alpha-led couples and I just think things would be so much easier if I just got to be a stupid omega, y'know? Like, give up control and not have to worry about things like this...I just...I wish I wasn't so neurotic, for a beta."

"If you weren't neurotic, you'd be something much worse," says Hannibal with a smile that he's well aware doesn't reach his eyes. "And perhaps your idealised view of an omega's existence is colouring your thoughts on the matter." Franklyn's mouth opens as if to argue but Hannibal stands in a fluid movement, straightening his suit jacket. "And unfortunately our

time is at an end Franklyn. We can discuss these feelings in your next session." Franklyn closes his mouth and flutters his eyelashes at Hannibal in a sickening impression of flirting. Hannibal ignores it, lest he give the beta more ammunition for his ridiculous crush. It's no wonder his previous therapist had been so eager to pass him along.

Hannibal smells the alpha on the other side of the door, but he feigns surprise when he opens it and sees the man standing in the waiting room. "This is a private exit for my patients," he states, his voice even as he looks the man up and down. *Law enforcement*, he decides, and he slips into his cool and calm skin, smiling benignly at the other alpha.

"Agent Jack Crawford," the alpha supplies, holding up an FBI badge for Hannibal's inspection. "Can we speak?" Hannibal can sense Franklyn brimming with excitement over being caught between *two* alphas.

"You can wait out here, and Franklyn, I shall see you next week unless...," he turns to look at the alpha agent, "...this is about him?" He knows it's not, but the small, twisted satisfaction he gets at seeing Franklyn's excited face is worth it. The beta looks so disappointed when the other alpha dismisses him too. Franklyn hesitates at the exit door a moment before leaving.

"I'll let you know when I'm available," says Hannibal, smiling blandly at the agent before returning to his office and closing the door.

Franklyn's session doesn't need notation. What more could Hannibal write week after week but "pathetic; alpha parental issues; unable to treat effectively due to patient's infatuation with all sources of power and dominance in his life." It's the same story, over and over, and it's gotten so very dull.

Hannibal sits at his desk and counts down a suitable period of time, short enough that it's not too *rude* but long enough to show the other alpha who is in control. Hannibal can smell the stress and anger coming from the other alpha when he lets the man enter his office. It rolls off him in waves and it's *delicious*.

"You were recommended by an old student of yours, Alana Bloom," Crawford says, settling himself into the seat without being asked. Hannibal sits opposite him, leaning back, showing the other alpha that he is secure, confident, comfortable in his territory. "I have a...challenge for you." Hannibal sits up a little straighter.The other man suddenly both piques his interest and chases away thoughts of how Hannibal might dispose of his body if he needs to take him out. "I have an omega on staff, he's very...*difficult*."

"An omega in the bureau? That's highly unusual," remarks Hannibal, stating the obvious of course. Omegas might have made many gains in many areas but still, the thought of an omega in something so inherently dominant as law enforcement is unheard of.

"Well, he's an...investigator, not even an agent, he's consulting. He's good at what he does but...If it were up to me he'd be out. It's just not right, but my superiors seem convinced enough about how good he is at the profiling to keep him around. It seems a bit--unseemly--in an environment like mine but omegas are statistically more likely to be victims, so maybe they think he can give us insight or something." Crawford rolls his eyes at the idea. Hannibal gets the impression that Crawford's the type of alpha who believes all omegas are such

simple, empty headed creatures that are easy to predict. Hannibal also sees the contradiction in his words. They're all for show. This investigator must be good to be worth all this effort.

”He's...unstable,” Crawford continues, “unmated at 35, prone to outbursts and odd behaviour. You know what they say about omegas who go too long without an alpha. He's got a history of reacting badly to certain cases...anyway, I just need to understand him, find out if he's going to crack. The last thing I need is a hysterical omega who can't do the job."

"An omega working on difficult cases *and*

he's unmated, no wonder you're concerned," says Hannibal with a small, thoughtful smile. "And of course, I have to wonder why Miss Bloom sent you my way. Surely this is the sort of case most psychologists would want to keep for themselves.”

”I believe since Alana has known the omega in question for a number of years, she doesn't see his problems as being as…*distracting* as the rest of us do.”

Hannibal smiles, wondering how bad this omega can possibly be; clearly it's nothing like what agent Crawford is implying. “I of course have to tell you that I don't deal with omega patients. All my patients are alphas and betas. It's not exactly normal for an alpha to allow another alpha private access to their omega.” Hannibal points out the obvious and does his best not to appear too eager for the opportunity to snoop into an FBI agent's business.

"Of course not," Jack says, leaning forward in his chair and staring intently at Hannibal. "But Will Graham is an unusual case--he's more obstinate than any omega has a right to be, all arrogant and unpredictable--and there's no alpha claimant to fight either of us on this. No one would want him, to be quite honest. I just need you to analyze him and let me know if he's going to snap. I need him on this case." He leans back in the chair once more. "The last thing my department needs is it getting out that we're using some hysterical unbound omega to solve our cases."

"I'll need to meet him, of course, and see if he'll agree to speak with me. I don't deal with unwilling patients; it would be a waste of both of our time." Hannibal isn't sure when he agreed to the proposition, he just knows he's looking forward to the meeting already, as though it wasn't a decision at all. How much fun to play with this Agent Crawford's investigator.

Crawford rolls his eyes and shrugs "Like it matters, he'll do as I say, if he wants to keep his job." Considering his earlier comments, Hannibal doubts agent Crawford can afford to lose this *Will Graham* from his case.

Hannibal smiles politely, thinking it funny that the other man seems so insistent on portraying himself this way. As though he places his own ego above the talents of this apparently *talented* omega. “Perhaps you can tell me a bit about the case he's working on. What about it is particularly triggering for an omega?” He may as well use the opportunity to snoop while he can. It's not often he has the chance to gain access to active murder investigations.

”Omega victims,” says Crawford with a sigh. “Will seems to think the perpetrator is an alpha who cares about one of the victims. I have no evidence though. I wouldn't buy any of his

theories if Alana Bloom wasn't telling me she agrees with him. I've been trying to get a beta profiler assigned to the case, but in the meantime, I'm stuck with Will Graham." From the tone of his voice, Hannibal doesn't think he's been trying all that hard.

Hannibal's thoughts are caught up, but not with the case that Crawford starts describing: the missing omegas and the turning point of a body. His mind instead traces over the mentions of Will Graham, Crawford's passing comments on Will painting a fuller picture than perhaps he realises.

Hannibal finds himself more interested in Will Graham than he should be. An omega in the FBI might perhaps be interesting to manipulate, but omegas always were. The way Crawford describes Will's leaps in logic, so confusing and unbelievable to someone like Crawford, just draws Hannibal's interest more. Clearly Will Graham has deeper talents.

Eventually, Crawford leaves, giving Hannibal his card and telling him he'll get in touch later with a time and place. Hannibal sits at his desk after the other alpha is gone and he wonders about this Will Graham, telling himself that he'll just observe, that it's simple intellectual curiosity. He just needs to approach it scientifically, of course. Omegas can be so much fun to study, especially when they're unusual, and Hannibal does so enjoy the more unusual things in life.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Thank you so much for your amazing response to this fic! It really makes the past month of slaving away at it worth it to know you're all enjoying my words.
>
> Many thanks to my swiggity-swag-the-hannibal-stag/FatalGrace for the beta! In a related note, I am desperately in need of a new beta. Please contact me via tumblr or twitter if you're interested and we can chat and see if it would be a good fit! Thanks <3
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will is having a bad morning, bad day, week, year, life, whatever. He knew when he woke up that the day wouldn't go well and even Winston's puppy eyes and face lick didn't pick up his mood. The dogs were only interested in getting their breakfast, after all.

An early morning meeting with Jack Crawford will do that to someone's mood, especially when that someone is an omega who's at the end of their rope when it comes to Crawford's constant alpha bullshit.

Will is suspicious the moment he realises there's another alpha in the room. It's bad enough spending time with Crawford, without having to deal with another asshole alpha trying to dominate him, too.

"Will, this is Doctor Lecter," says Crawford, not bothering to stand up from behind his desk. "Hannibal, this is Will." Will notices the way Crawford casually gestures in his direction, he sees the way Crawford's eyes bore into him and he takes a mental note of another instance of Crawford's habit of leaving formality at the door when it comes to dealing with omegas. To Will's surprise, the other alpha, who's sitting with his back to the door, turns in his seat, then smiles and stands, holding out his hand. It's not something Will is used to; an alpha shaking his hand implies they have some level of respect for him. Will finds his slow reaction to the gesture a little rude and he mentally castigates himself.

"Mister Graham," the tall alpha says, still holding his hand out as he looks intently at Will's face. "Call me Hannibal, please." He has an accent and an intense gaze, and small lines appear on his face when he smiles. It's friendly, Will thinks, not the predatory smile most alphas tend to direct at him. Will cautiously sticks his hand out, thinking more about what will happen if he declines than what might happen if he accepts. He hastily shakes Doctor Lecter's hand and it feels like the other man's hand is far too warm. Will pulls his hand back quickly from the firm grip. He realises he's allowed himself to look into the alpha's eyes and he averts his gaze quickly, even before he realises the alpha isn't exactly attempting to stare him down.

Doctor Lecter, *Hannibal*, sits down, leaning casually back and turning to face Crawford. Will pulls the empty chair back a little, moving it a few inches further away from both alphas. He takes longer than necessary as he carefully places his satchel down, trying to kill time. Being an omega in a room with two alphas isn't exactly the most comfortable position to be in.

"So, what's this about? Is Doctor Lecter here about the case?" Will knows he's not. He knows Crawford wouldn't bother to call Will in if this was about the case; he'd just pass any relevant information on through a third party. In fact, Crawford gives the impression he doesn't buy Will's theory regarding the killer's cannibalism, and he's merely humouring Will until he can find more evidence. Crawford smiles blandly and the obviously fake pleasantness makes Will grit his teeth.

Crawford opens his mouth to speak but Doctor Lecter cuts him off, leaning forward conspiratorially. "I've looked through the files and read your notes on the case; I have some thoughts of my own, if you're interested." Will frowns, turning his head down to look at the floor, his eyes shifting across the carpet so he doesn't have to look at either alpha. He sees this new strange alpha's hands from the corner of his vision, held out and fingers threaded together, his elbows leaning on his thighs. "I'd love to discuss your profile," Doctor Lecter adds, waiting for a response.

Will takes a deep breath, steeling himself and endeavouring to keep his voice calm as he asks the question that's been on his mind. "So, you feel the need to get a second opinion on my profile. Learn anything new?"

Will can practically feel Crawford getting worked up, the haze of alpha pheromones emanating from the man nearly overpowering Will's mind. He idly notices that Doctor Lecter's scent is far more subtle and controlled. It isn't Crawford who speaks though, despite his apparent urge to yell. "You're not fond of eye contact --only with alphas, I assume?" Doctor Lecter's voice rises as though he's asking a question. Will isn't sure he really wants an answer. Most alphas just want some pitiful grovelling and agreement with whatever they say.

"Eyes are distracting, no matter whose they are," says Will softly, his eyes drifting to the edge of the alpha's face before he consciously reverts them to the floor. "See too much, don't see enough…." he tails off and sighs quietly, still not sure exactly what this conversation is supposed to accomplish. "It's hard to focus when everyone's doing their utmost to use your biology against you, take away your choices." Will risks a quick glance up to Dr Lecter's face, catching the man's gaze from the edge of his own, but he doesn't see the hard stare of an alpha trying to dominate, he sees curiosity, --something inquisitive and not openly threatening.

"Ah, of course," says Dr Lecter, thoughtfully. "I imagine you see all sorts of things then; perhaps even your own nature reflected back at you, your inability to overcome parts of yourself you'd prefer didn't exist."

Something about Dr Lecter's words stab at Will, hurt him and burn him inside, but the last thing he wants is to give the alpha the satisfaction of thinking he's put one over on him, that he's succeeded in putting an omega back in it's place. "I thought we were here to profile the killer, not me."

"Doctor Lecter is a psychiatrist, Will," says Jack. Will feels his stomach drop. So much for discussing the case. This is an ambush. He tenses in his seat, ready to spring into action, his instincts preparing him for flight.

"What the hell," snaps Will, staring at the spot of carpet between his feet so intensely he thinks it could burst into flames at any moment. He doesn't want to be stared down by an alpha and lose the rage that's filling him. "What the hell is your problem? There's nothing wrong with me. It's everyone else that's the issue here."

”Will, I’m sorry.” The words almost don’t make it through Will’s seething rage but he hears them, takes a moment to let them sink in. His gaze slides across the carpet and stops at Doctor Lecter’s feet--his leather shoes polished and well cared for, his pressed pants falling perfectly against them. Will breathes deeply through his nose and Hannibal continues. “I did not realise that this was an ambush. I assure you, I only came here because I was led to believe this meeting was your choice for your best interest.”

”Well it’s *not*,” Will snarls, standing abruptly. He keeps his head down so he doesn’t have to look at either alpha ; he doesn't want his resolve to crumble. “I don’t care what you *want*, I’m not...not sick in the head or whatever it is Agent Crawford has told you is wrong with me. I'm not some hysterical omega.”

”You sure sound like one,” snaps Crawford from across the desk and then Will’s feet are turning him around and he’s marching to the door before the urge to fall to his knees and grovel for forgiveness overtakes him. He slams the door on the way out, but it’s not as satisfying as he had hoped. *Fuck Jack Crawford*, he thinks. *Stupid alphas thinking they own the world*.

Will’s rage carries him out of Crawford’s office and all the way to the parking lot and it’s only when he reaches for his keys that he realizes he’s left his things behind. A maniacal sounding laugh bubbles up from his throat involuntarily, and he laughs out of sheer frustration at his own stupidity. So much for a dramatic exit.

The only reason he stops to breathe is the thought that the sight of him standing alone laughing to himself isn’t doing much to dispel the "hysterical omega" accusations.

Wil considers getting a taxi and coming back for his truck later, but the keys to his house are on the same ring and where else does he have to go? He doesn’t have a choice. It’s stupid anyway, for him to be *this* cowardly. He's standing up for himself, so what if it’s against two alphas? He can handle himself. He doesn’t want to though--doesn’t want to turn around and march back in there and act like there’s nothing wrong. Not when he hates Crawford so much at this very moment. His feet just don’t want to move.

Will finally does move, because he can't stand forlornly in the parking lot forever. He has to make the only choice available and go back in there. He walks slowly to the entranceway and hovers near the glass doors. Inside he catches sight of the beta at the security desk eyeing him up. Will sighs. “It’s now or never,” he murmurs to himself.

Will is halfway through the reception area when he sees Doctor Lecter striding towards him. Will drops his eyes, not meeting the alpha’s stare, and instead looks at the satchel in his hand-

-Will’s satchel. Doctor Lecter stops in front of him and Will stares straight ahead, eyes resting on the alpha's sweater and observing the fabric intently. “You forgot this. I thought I’d bring it to you on my way out,” says Doctor Lecter softly. Will doesn’t hear even a hint of scorn in his voice, just gentle understanding. “I’m sorry, about Jack.”

Will nods, flicking his gaze up to Doctor Lecter’s chin before returning to his comfortable spot on the sweater. “Thanks,” he mumbles. He wants to say that the case is affecting him, that his previous cases are affecting him. He’s not unstable because he’s an *omega*; he’s got the same issues anyone else with his ability to empathise would suffer from. Being an omega is just an extra helping of shit for his troubles. He doesn’t say anything though, just carefully takes the bag that Doctor Lecter holds out, placing his fingers around the worn leather in such a way that he’s not forced to touch the alpha’s skin.

”I think Jack doesn’t realise that he does not always know what’s best for those around him,” offers Doctor Lecter and Will finds himself nodding again. “Despite this unpleasantness, it has been a pleasure to meet you Mister Graham.” He reaches into his pocket and produces a business card. As he holds it out, Will takes it hesitantly, gripping the corner furthest from the long fingers holding the other side. “Perhaps you’ll change your mind about needing someone to speak to, and even if you do not, I believe I’d find your thoughts on criminal psychology fascinating and enlightening. My door is always open to you and I hope you might meet with me, your choice this time.”

The little voice in Will’s head that would usually be telling him to crumple the card up and throw it in the alpha’s face, say something about how he’d never be comfortable talking to the alpha, *any* alpha about anything isn’t there. For once, that part of Will is silent and he isn’t quite sure what about Doctor Lecter’s demeanor makes him feel that way. Will nods once more, his voice a little hoarse when he finally speaks. “Thank you Doctor Lecter, I’ll keep that in mind.”

”Hannibal,” he says, “I really would prefer if you’d call me Hannibal, Will.”

”Thank you, Hannibal,” says Will, his voice barely quavering. He finds his eyes meeting the other man’s for the briefest second as he looks up. He gets a smile in return and then Hannibal is leaving, striding away to hand in his visitor’s pass at the security desk. Will stays frozen, staring at the alpha’s back. It’s easier to look now when the man is turned away like this.

Hannibal doesn’t look at him as he turns directly toward the exit and leaves, and he doesn't once look back as Will watches, confused and thinking a million conflicting thoughts about one of the strangest alphas Will thinks he’s ever met.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the gap in posting! My new beta is working really hard on the rough draft and it looks like I'll be able to get back to regular updates!

Unfortunately it's a short chapter (but I might be able to post another later!). For now though, enjoy!

Many thanks to my awesome betas. swiggity-swag-the-hannibal-stag/FatalGrace and GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead. Thanks you guys!

It’s been quite some time since Hannibal has found himself enchanted with someone outside of himself. And it’s more than a passing interest; he can already tell that this one will hold his attention for a while yet. Will Graham is a fascinating creature on paper, but in person, he’s simply delightful-a feast of possibilities.

When he sees Will walk into Jack's office it's as if a gift has been dropped in his lap, and suddenly it’s about so much more than an inside look at the investigation. The investigator is the interesting part in this equation. Will Graham, trying to hide his shyness with bluster. He’s angry and fascinating, and the glimpse he gets of Will’s mind makes him want to see more, to find out just how deep Will’s darkness goes. His scent is complex--even layered under that horrid cologne, his hair messy, and his face attractive--though it's hidden behind unshaven scruff and glasses. Hannibal can tell that he’s going to be a lot of fun.

It’s as though Will is inviting him to follow, rushing from the room like that. It’s an alpha’s instinct to give chase and the bag on the floor just gives Hannibal an excuse to follow him, to tell Jack that it’s fine, he’ll take the bag on his way out, and that the meeting may as well come to an end with Will’s departure. It’s a very different rush than when he takes a life, but he's still chasing down prey nonetheless.

Hannibal’s brief interaction with Will has given him a teasing glimpse into Will’s mind, and it makes him want to know Will better; to learn his full potential, to see him realize it--to get Will to truly look him in the eye. Hannibal wants to unleash the darkness hiding within Will Graham.

Thoughts of Will swirl through Hannibal’s mind; he idly plans and considers the possible outcomes of whatever he might decide to do to the man. Hannibal finds himself smiling as he drives home, the decision bringing his plans for tonight to a sense of finality. Will is sure to make the perfect plaything and it’ll be interesting to see how far he can bend. Particularly since Will is an omega who is clearly distrustful of all alphas, who feels himself so above his

own biology. What could be more fun than turning it all on its head? What fun to destroy all Will's built-up walls and ideas of the world --what fun to tear his whole worldview apart?

It's been an age since Hannibal's thought of omegas, they've always seemed overly simple and boring, not much of a challenge for someone like him. They are usually so beautiful and dull, such silly creatures who are so eager to play along with the rules. To find one so desperate to *fight* promises much entertainment.

Hannibal is an alpha. Omegas are expected. Hannibal has never followed the prescribed path, has always chosen to avoid it. To interact with an omega would be too close to courting, too close to being *normal* and normal is too close to mundane. It's been a long time since he's had interesting quarry and Will being an omega is the least of his interest. It simply adds a new twist to his favourite games.

In the way a typical alpha with thoughts of mating and cubs might think, single mindedly on their prey, Hannibal thinks single mindedly on his own goal. The simple pleasure of games, of twisting the world around him and seeing what breaks has grown to be one of Hannibal's favourite ways to pass time. Playing with Will is going to be such *fun* and Hannibal thinks of how Will Graham might react to a different sort of alpha, how he'll cope with whatever Hannibal can think to do to him. Will seems focused on his self-determination. Hannibal thinks the trick to it will be getting him to believe he chooses as freely as possible. Will might not want to enjoy their future games, but Hannibal knows he won't really have a choice.

Hannibal considers his next step as a gift, his next act as a tribute to Will. A traditional first step when courting an omega is the presentation of a gift of intention and Hannibal intends to present one. A unique gift for a unique omega, though Hannibal refuses to call it *courting*.

He hasn't been able to truly speak with Will; hasn't had the hoped-for conversation about the missing omegas; hasn't spoken about the other things that are clearly haunting the the other man. There's so much he could tell Will to unlock this case. There are details that Hannibal had little desire to share; he much preferred watching the killer take out more omegas. Of course, that was before he'd seen Will Graham, had him on his mind and in his sights. It's not a *courting* gift, but it's a gift for Will, nonetheless. Hannibal's decision is made.

It's as though the universe has aligned everything perfectly, his victim making herself known to him, the location for the staging coming to him as though it *wants* to be chosen, the plans falling into place. It's with light and deft hands that Hannibal creates his masterpiece, the measured beauty of the image, his gift to Will. It's the missing puzzle piece. The secret to the trick. Hannibal can't keep himself from smiling at the thought of Will's reaction when the curtain is lifted and all is revealed. His smile remains as he makes his way home, cleans up the evidence, and prepares a meal worthy of the occasion.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> And another chapter today because i was feeling generous and you've all been so lovely! (For anyone late to the party, make sure you read Chapter 4 *first*.)
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the amazing work betaing!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It's beautiful in its own way. Beautiful and horrific. The pale skin contrasts sharply with the black feathers of the scavenger birds, and Will shoos them away as he approaches.The scene is so perfectly constructed, laid out so carefully, presented to him--all the clues he needs on a platter.

The image burns itself into his retinas and Will feels thoughts arranging themselves in the back of his mind, his subconscious thoughtfully providing him with conclusions.

It was Beverly who called him with the news of the body. Will has told Crawford that he needs to see the scene, see the bodies to make a profile and get inside the killer's head. Perhaps Crawford is afraid Will might think he's started earning some kind of respect if he calls Will himself. Maybe it's simply that if things had been up to Crawford, Alana would be working this case instead.

Will breathes it in--the feeling of the place, breathes in the killer, what all this says about them. It's obviously not the same killer. Every thread of the scene is a contrasting opposite of such glaring significance he'd have to be blind not to see it. It's everything the alpha that Will has been studying is not.

"It's…wrong," he mumbles to himself. The people around him ignore him, continue taking pictures and making notes.

Will stands, staring at the girl's body, anger building in him over the treatment of her body--how her corpse was *dishonored* like that. Even in death, this poor omega has been treated as so much *less than*. He shoves his hands in his jacket pockets, hunching his shoulders and studying the scene, committing every piece to memory. He's going to catch whoever did this.

Will smells Crawford, his scent wafting in from behind him and he turns around. Better to not have his back to a predator. Crawford is looking at the girl's body so Will takes the opportunity to look at the man properly. He looks grim, serious; a frown across his face. *Probably just worried about the call this girl's alpha will put in to the agent in charge*, the snarky part of Will's brain supplies.

Will walks towards the alpha, head down, stopping beside him so he can face an empty section of the field instead. Will looks at the trodden down path where people move from the road, here to crawl all over and search every square inch of the place. Will is certain they won't find anything.

"They're calling him the Minnesota Shrike," Crawford says, looking at the body. "Some sort of bird? Just ask Price, he'll give you the gory details." Crawford sighs, and for the first time, Will senses a small gap in the alpha's bluster.

Will breathes deeply, scenting the air and taking in all the overlapping scents around them. He weighs things up in his head before he finally opens his mouth. "It's not the same alpha." Thankfully, his voice sounds more confident than usual.

Crawford snorts derisively. "You came to that conclusion pretty fast. It's an omega girl, on a rack of antlers. What more do you want? The killer is escalating and the press has a hold of this now, Will."

Will bites his lip a moment, choosing his words carefully. "It's a copycat, I think. You said Freddie Lounds published some leaked information, right? Enough for someone to come up with the stag head?" Will folds his arms around himself, suddenly noticing the cold air. "Besides, whoever did this, is doing it for show, it's not about the victim. Our alpha cannibal loves their victims, they want to consume them...and this..." Will turns to look over his shoulder, back at the girl on display. "...whoever killed this girl thought her no better than a pig. They wanted her found like this...on display." Will's stomach turns at the thought, suddenly seeing glimpses in his mind's eye of every alpha that had ever given him those condescending looks. It's a *lot* of condescending looks.

Will feels disgusted with himself when he feels the killer's thoughts creep up on him. When he slips into the killer's way of thinking, it's subconscious, something that happens without his consent and it makes him feel wrong and dirty. To think and actually *understand* the level of distaste the this girl's killer must have felt towards her.

"Will, you need to give me something more to go on than wild speculation," says Crawford, his voice harsh. "You think I'm about to call in to Quantico with some unsupported theory?" Will's thankful for the interruption--it breaks him out of his current line of thought. He turns around to look at the body instead, shaking his head in a futile attempt to clear the killer out.

"Okay," he says quietly. "The one who killed Elise Nichols had a place to do it and…" he gestures to the girl's body, "...no interest in this…*field kabuki*." As the words come to him, Will knows it's a perfect description of this show. It's just a big display, left out for them to find. "There's a house, cabin, something with an antler room where they do it. They…." Will's voice tails off as the thoughts in his head slot into place, connections are made and it's as though his mind is racing ahead of himself. "This alpha has a daughter, omega, same age...she's going to be old enough to be courted soon. She's the same as the other girls, same hair colour, eye colour, height, weight….she's an only child and soon some alpha is going to come and take her away. This alpha can't stand the thought of losing her." Will finds himself shaking as the words tumble from his mouth.

”What about the copycat?” asks Crawford and Will can’t even bring himself to gloat over the fact that Crawford’s not arguing with him, even if his tone doesn’t sound as though he’s really taking it seriously.

”Intelligent psychopath, definitely a sadist. No pattern, no evidence...very hard to catch.” He finds his voice breaking a little and he turns quickly and starts walking briskly towards the fence line. He pauses a moment, swinging back around to call out to Crawford, “Why don’t you have Doctor Lecter draw up a profile, you seemed rather impressed with him.” He turns back and marches on, frustrated that his little snipe at Crawford hasn’t actually made him feel any better. He can’t think about this new monster, so he might as well let it be someone else’s problem anyway. He needs to focus on what he can control, the killer that might actually be within his grasp. Things are falling into place.

It’s hard to maintain his outward demeanor, faking calm as he marches to his car, pulling off the latex gloves as he moves through the field. The emotions well up in him, raw, warring inside. The killer’s glee and satisfaction versus his own horror and revulsion and it makes him feel sick.

As he drives back to his motel, Will wonders momentarily about the person who killed the girl on the stag head. A psychopath, yes, probably male, Will thinks, considering the weight of the stag head. An alpha, also yes. Will is certain there’s no motive, on a logical analytical level, he knows the person who did this is a psychopath who doesn’t *need* a motive. But he can’t help but wonder, why would a killer put such a perfect clue--laid out for him, all the parts of the case he’s working on--in stark relief. There’s something more at play here.

He gets straight into the shower when he gets back to his motel but it doesn’t clear his head. Doesn’t wash away any of the dark thoughts. He sees images of the girl’s body, of Elise Nichols, the faces of so many victims all merging together behind his eyelids. When he opens his eyes he sees the creature, stalking him, the stag with the black feathers, a new creature to torment him. It’s a new addition to the cast of monsters. One he knows will be with him for quite some time.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your amazing responses to this fic!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the amazing work betaing!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will looks rumpled and a little shaken to see Hannibal at his door first thing in the morning. His eyes widen and then he's looking down again, a habit Hannibal resolves to break him of. "Good morning, Will," Hannibal says pleasantly, smiling and looking past Will into the dark interior of the motel room. "May I come in?" Will stares straight ahead--his eyes fixed on Hannibal's chest, a confused frown creasing his face. He bites his lip.

"Where's Crawford?" Will's voice sounds rough, as though he's just woken up. Considering he's standing in a t-shirt and boxer briefs, it's most likely the case. Hannibal controls himself, projecting calm so that Will's sleepy mind won't perceive him as a threat.

"He's in court. He invited me to come along today before he received the news; it was not his intention to thrust the two of us together." Hannibal smiles again, catching Will's eyes as he glances up at Hannibal's face for a split second. "May I come in?" Hannibal repeats, and with another bite of his lip, another sideways glance, Will finally steps aside and allows Hannibal to enter the room.

Will stands by the door a moment, watching as Hannibal moves into the room. "So you're my chaperone then?" He says softly, a note of anger in his voice. "Typical." He moves hurriedly to grab his pants and get dressed. As much as Hannibal would enjoy watching, he does the polite thing and averts his gaze. Instead, he takes the container of food out and sets it on the small table under the window. He draws back the hideous curtains, letting some natural light into the dingy room.

"I'm sorry, Will," he says, as Will moves into the bathroom. "I understand how frustrated you must be at Jack's insistence on us speaking with one another."

Will reappears from the bathroom, still unshaven and rumpled, but fully clothed now. "So it's all Jack's doing? It's his fault I need an alpha with me while I investigate this lead?"

Hannibal seats himself at the small table, opening the containers of food and placing a fork down on the table in front of the empty chair. "I believe Jack is simply concerned for your well being. It's his biology tricking his mind into thinking you're far more helpless than you

are.” He gestures to the empty seat. “Please, sit. I prefer to prepare my own meals so I brought a homemade breakfast.”

Will shuffles over, pulling the chair far back and sitting down awkwardly on the edge, as though he needs to be ready to spring up and run at any moment. He frowns. Hannibal should not have that calm tone of voice while Will is annoyed. It’s not fair for him to sound so *reasonable*. “Crawford thinks I’m broken because I’m an omega who isn’t barefoot and pregnant.”

”And you’re broken because of the work he has you do instead?” asks Hannibal. Will’s head snaps up and his hands go to fists on the table.

”I never said I was broken,” he says with a frown, looking up into Hannibal’s eyes for a second before his gaze skitters away once more. How delightful, the way Will denies his nature like that. Hannibal can’t help but smile. Will’s anger emanates from him, nearly palpable. He’s in denial of course, but Hannibal intends to push his definition of broken a bit askew.

Hannibal pushes the food container closer to Will. “A protein scramble to start your day, eggs and sausage.” He watches, pleased, as Will first tastes the food, then begins eating enthusiastically. Will’s eyes slide closed and for a few moments, the worry slides off his face; the tension seems to leave his body as he simply enjoys the experience of eating a finely crafted meal. The moment is far too fleeting as Will swallows, realises he has Hannibal’s attention and returns to his tight shouldered pose, gaze fixed on the table between them.

”Delicious, thank you,” says Will softly, his eyes glancing up at Hannibal’s face again briefly. He does it more and more frequently and Hannibal smiles at the movement. It will only be a matter of time before he’s gained Will’s trust. Instincts are funny things, stronger than both of them, in the end. Hannibal is certain he knows what will win out.

”You’re most welcome Will. I enjoy cooking for others.” Hannibal props his chin on the back of one fist, picking up his own fork with his free hand. Will continues to eat enthusiastically and Hannibal is simply glad that he’s enjoying part of Hannibal’s gift to him. “My request that you call me was genuine, but I still feel I should apologise again for my unintended ambush.”

Will swallows hastily. “Which one?”

Hannibal lifts his chin from his hand and looks at Will, who’s staring back with a challenging expression on his face. Hannibal smiles at the extended eye contact. “Both, I suppose.”

Will’s drops his eyes and he puts the fork down, wiping his mouth with the paper napkin provided. He coughs slightly. “I need to use the bathroom,” he says softly, getting up from his chair.

”I feel as though I shall be apologising quite a bit, Will, so perhaps I should use them sparingly lest you tire of them eventually.”

Will freezes on his way to the bathroom, the words hang in the air for a beat of silence just on the side of uncomfortably long. “Just keep things professional.” He starts moving again, closes the bathroom door behind himself and Hannibal sits, quietly eating his own breakfast. He’s ready to speak when Will reappears.

”Is it outside the realms of possibility that we might socialise like adults? Perhaps even become friendly?” Will rolls his eyes at this, glancing at Hannibal’s face, possibly to check if he’s joking. He’s not.

”No alpha wants to socialise with an omega; you don’t want to be friends. You’re only here because Crawford asked you, since he couldn’t babysit me himself and I don’t get a choice in the matter.”

Hannibal chuckles. “There you go again, reducing everything down to the biology you hate so much.” Will frowns at the remark but doesn’t say anything further, just moves to sit back down in front of Hannibal. “Is it my being an alpha or the lack of choice in our spending time together that makes you so frustrated then, Will?”

Will doesn’t respond for a minute, continuing to eat. They sit in relative silence, Hannibal waiting for Will to to form his thoughts and speak to him. “Perhaps I just don’t find you very interesting, Doctor Lecter,” Will blurts out. Hannibal smiles at Will’s artless attempt to win back the power between them.

”You will,” says Hannibal, smiling confidently and Will’s head snaps up, eyes narrowing. Hannibal sees the way Will’s eyes linger on his own, holding his gaze. “I’ve heard you have a knack for monsters.”

Will looks away, nervous again, his momentary bravado fading. “And who told you that?”

”Agent Crawford,” answers Hannibal, studying Will’s face for any kind of response to the lie. He’s read Will’s file, seen the work he’s done in the past, he doesn’t need Crawford to tell him of Will’s talents.

Will snorts a bit. “That sounds like superstition to me.”

Hannibal studies Will’s face, deciding to change tact. “I called Doctor Bloom about you, I believe you two are good friends? She’s rather protective, wouldn’t speak a word about you, but at the same time she managed to ask me to keep an eye on you.” Will frowns at the table, absentmindedly scratching at the veneer next to his unfinished meal. He bites his lip, frowns, and Hannibal would love to know the exact series of thoughts travelling through Will’s head at precisely this moment.

”The Shrike didn’t kill the girl in the field,” he says. “I assume Crawford gave you the files? Well, it wasn’t the Shrike.” Hannibal watches Will closely, sees the expressions crossing his face--thought, worry, mistrust, finally settling into a mask of indifference, as though Hannibal’s next words don’t matter at all.

”The devil is in the details. What didn’t your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?” Hannibal has to pull himself back; no need to be obvious in his interest, even though

he feels a sense of urgent excitement to know what Will thinks of the little scene he set for him, the clues he placed so carefully.

”Everything,” says Will so softly he’s barely audible. He bites his lip, raising his eyes to Hannibal’s. His voice is a little more confident when he speaks again. “Everything was different, he showed me a negative so I could see the positive. It was practically gift-wrapped.” Hannibal smiles, shifting his gaze to the window once more.

”So many ugly variables, so much to see. How about the Shrike? Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?” Will frowns and Hannibal looks back to see Will watching him, holding his gaze this time.

”He has a few,” says Will softly before looking down at his meal, picking up the fork again.

”Ever have any problems, Will?” The frown on Will’s forehead deepens and he doesn’t respond. Hannibal folds his hands on the table, leaning forward a little. “Of course you don’t, Will. You and I are just alike--problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.” Will rolls his eyes and snorts through his nose as he pushes a piece of sausage around the container with his fork.

”My problem is alphas trying to control me,” says Will in a low voice before spearing the piece of sausage and biting into it.

Hannibal smiles and tilts his head a little. “Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup, fine china used for only the most special guests….”

”Just another control...if he was really worried he’d back off,” says Will, his voice betraying his annoyance. “It’s never about actual concerns, just perceived ones. It’s an alpha thing, how about you, how do you see me?” asks Will, looking up from the food to Hannibal’s face.

Hannibal smiles, words coming to him as he looks back into Will’s face. “The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.” It’s apt enough, if not a complete truth, but it serves his purposes perfectly. Hannibal watches Will as he breaks the eye contact to look down at the table, deep in thought. “The mongoose is far more dangerous than anyone suspects and it is the one that *chooses* to hunt the snake,” adds Hannibal. Will bites his lip.

”Isn’t it just an animal’s instinct?” Will asks. Hannibal smiles and gestures to the food.

“Finish your breakfast.” Will doesn’t argue at the direct order, even though Hannibal can tell his immediate desire was to do so. He follows the command without complaint.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your continued support dearest readers!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It wasn't real. It was as though he was reconstructing yet another crime scene where some horrific act had taken place. It was someone else's memories, it was someone else's actions. But despite the haze surrounding it, Will knew it was real; he could feel the itch of drying blood on his face, could still hear the panicked gasps, the sound of blood bubbling up, see the look of terror on Abigail Hobbs' face. Will closes his eyes and shakes his head, trying to clear the image of the frightened girl's face, the feeling of complete helplessness at the sight of all that blood.

He rewinds his memories, how the morning had started, so quiet and subdued. The meal with Hannibal, the quiet stillness, how much he had dreaded a boring day of chasing the small lead. He'd even admit that he'd *enjoyed* the morning. Despite how he occasionally irritated Will, Hannibal could be quite interesting. He was at least not living down to Will's expectations.

The lead wasn't supposed to go anywhere. The letters of resignation in the drawer, the simple lack of a forwarding address--it was all so stupid. Just dumb luck, or lack thereof, led them here and he was still just that little bit too late.

Will watches as Abigail Hobbs is loaded into the ambulance and he leans against the side of the police car as his eyes come to rest on Hannibal. Hannibal is hovering over her, taking care of her, being protective. Will hates to admit it, but he *needed* him today. Will's hands had been shaking, panic had set in, and then Hannibal had appeared--all steady and strong and capable as he'd tended to Abigail, controlled the bleeding. Will wants to believe that Hannibal's presence was calming because of his experience as a doctor. Instead, Will thinks the truth might be more simple: he had allowed the alpha to calm him, had *wanted* him to take control of the situation.

Will's eyes refocus and he notices the blood on his glasses and once he sees it, he can't go back to staring right through it again. He pulls the glasses off his face, but his hands are shaking too much to wipe them off. He drops his hands to his sides, glasses held loosely between two fingers. Police officers move around him, and he sees them zipping up the bag containing Mrs Hobbs. Yet another omega dead, and Will wonders if she's going to start

haunting him too. His stomach twists at the thought of Abigail dying, but he pushes it down. *Hannibal has things under control, he tells himself.*

***

Will feels like a coward, taking the car keys and going straight back to his motel room. But the blood on his skin burns him, makes him itch and want to claw his skin right off. The hot shower doesn't help much, even if it does wash off the blood. Will can still feel something on him, pressing into his skin, the weight of his gun still in his empty hand. There'll be an investigation, because he shot and killed someone. Shot and killed an *alpha*, he corrects himself. Suspect or not, Garrett Jacob Hobbs was an alpha, and everyone who hears the tale will be shocked to hear how he killed his own mate and would have killed his own daughter if Will hadn't pulled the trigger. Will is sure he'll get to read some tasteless piece about it on that stupid website. He's also certain there will be plenty of pieces in the press about the horror of an alpha turning on his omegas, and the added horror of an omega being the one to take him down. There'll be an investigation of him, where a bunch of alphas will look at him and decide him too frail to handle the repercussions of pulling that trigger.

Will dresses and sits on the bed in the dimly lit motel room. Just hours ago, he'd been here eating breakfast a few feet from where he now sits. Will wishes he could turn the clock back, go sooner, stop Hobbs from killing his wife. He balls a fist up and pushes it against his forehead, pressing hard enough so he can focus on something outside his mind.

He sits like that for a long time, willing the memories to subside, willing away the emotions he'd felt. It's a long time of nothing; hours, in fact, and he spends it hiding from what's happened. He remembers pulling the trigger, once, twice, and again, pulling the trigger until the clip was empty and Hobbs was no longer a threat. It was instinct, he tells himself. The weight of everything around him pushing his finger until he didn't have a *choice*. When they ask, he'll tell them he was protecting the girl. It's true, even if they roll their eyes at him and want to take his gun away.

Will shakes his head a little and wonders if he should call Alana. He *should* call her, but he knows she'll be nothing but nice to him, sympathetic. She'll be there for him and listen attentively. Will doesn't call, the thought of her being understanding and trying to help just makes him feel sick. He should call her and ask her to cover his morning lectures at least. He should but he won't. He has no desire to be practical at the moment. Will doesn't want to do anything right now. He doesn't want to hear Alana's voice, doesn't want her to try to understand. He just wants to *be*. He needs to exist and process this, needs to see it unfold before him, allow the memories to settle into some kind of final version of events. There's only one place he can do that where he'll not be forced to do it alone.

Will climbs back in the car, tells himself he's imagining that he can smell Hobb's blood in the car, some kind of transfer from the filthy clothing. It's in his head but he cracks the window open anyway as he drives, shivering at the blast of cold air as he makes his way to the hospital.

The memories swirl in his head as he drives, the distance doing nothing to clear his head. Will bites his lip and breathes through his nose, gripping the steering wheel tight. He shivers

from something more than the cold air rushing into the car and making his skin turn to gooseflesh under his clothing.

He doesn't even remember parking the car, crossing to the hospital doors and entering the building, showing the guard his ID. It's all a hazy dream until he reaches Abigail's room. She's so small and pale and she should be dead but her chest is rising and falling. She's alive and for a fleeting moment the nightmares seem worth it.

Will pauses in the doorway as Hannibal comes into view, sleeping on the chair by the bed, holding Abigail's hand. He looks tired, even while sleeping. He's somehow avoided getting blood on his sweater and his breathing is soft and silent. Will stands and watches them both.

Will has a nagging feeling that he's intruding, that he's walked into somewhere he should feel entirely out of place. But he wants to be here, needs to be here, to reassure himself that Abigail is alive, that they saved her. He needs to justify the things he's done. He walks as quietly as possible to the empty chair on the other side of her bed and sits down. He watches her breathe and can't help but watch Hannibal too, positioned just past her. They both sleep, unaware of his presence, peaceful in a way Will can't even dream of right now. There's a warmth in his chest and his eyes sting but Will tells himself not to do it, not to be weak and pathetic. The tears fall anyway and he wipes at them with the sleeve of his shirt.

When the tears stop Will's face is sore and puffy, and eventually his eyes grow heavy, too heavy to fight and he slouches in the chair. Just a minute, just to rest his sore eyes, he tells himself, not too long or the nightmares will wake them all. Just a few minutes. He sleeps deeply, dreamless and undisturbed.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> Thank you for your support! This fic is completed (and just in the process of being edited) so hopefully I can post the next chapter of this *very* soon! I am already working on more new fic too :D
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal lifts the wineglass to his lips, tasting it and smiling before setting it back down on the kitchen counter top. It will pair perfectly with the recipe he's selected for the kidneys. He conjures up the image of Will, covered in blood and breathing hard and looking so beautiful and *powerful* after taking life. It is a pleasant image. One he shall hold onto.

The telephone rings and it makes him frown at the sudden noisy intrusion into his quiet solitude. He picks up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hannibal. Hi, wanted to call you about what's happened." Jack Crawford's voice comes out of the receiver. Hannibal considers the man is probably still at his office, late into the evening. How sad to be so caught up in work as to not be able to enjoy life.

"Jack, it's good to hear from you, despite the circumstances." Hannibal keeps his voice light and pleasant despite his irritation. He hears Jack sigh and the sound of him shifting in his chair on the other end of the line.

"It's been a long day, dealing with...all this," says Jack, tired and worn out sounding. Hannibal pours more wine into the glass and picks it up. He to seat himself more comfortably. "All this fallout over Will. It'd be easier if he hadn't shot Hobbs."

"He didn't have a choice, Jack," says Hannibal, pausing to swallow down a sip of wine. "Surely it's not the first time one of your agents has discharged their weapon into a suspect?"

"Of course not," snaps Jack, his voice harsh for a moment before he sighs, the anger dissipating just as quickly as it had appeared. "It's just, Will's different, we had to fight to get him cleared to carry a gun in the first place."

"I didn't think you'd be so concerned over his safety," offers Hannibal, tilting his glass in the light and watching the liquid inside. "Will seems as though he's simply an irritating holdover from your predecessor….forgive me Jack, that's just how I had come to understand things." Hannibal smiles softly, enjoying the opportunity Jack has presented him to learn as much as possible about Will. Anything Hannibal can get out of Jack will surely come in handy.

”Will is a pain in my ass, is what he is,” says Jack quietly. Hannibal hears the sound of him drinking from a glass and he imagines that Jack has his own alcoholic beverage. It’s something a little harder than wine, stowed in his office, only for situations like this. “He makes these wild leaps, I can’t understand them but if you look at his work...I don’t know how he does it but the proof is right there...and all my agents carry weapons.”

”That sounds like you respect him,” says Hannibal, falling into the familiar speech patterns of his therapy sessions.

”He’s an omega,” says Jack, as though the statement explains everything. Hannibal considers the words for a few moments, draining his glass of the last of the wine. Jack helpfully fills the silence. “He’s already got a high opinion of himself...bit full of himself off his successful cases. It’s tiring having an omega around all the time you know.”

Hannibal smiles to himself. “Oh yes, he doesn’t seem to hold much respect for social mores,” Hannibal offers. It’s open enough that Jack can take it as agreement if he wishes. He does.

”Hmm, he’s just so damn disrespectful – you know the day before his last heat came on he *came in*? I heard all about it, just asking for trouble. There’s all sorts of rumours about him too….” Jack trails off and Hannibal hears him shuffle things at his desk, the sound of the phone being shifted and then liquid being poured. Hannibal ponders how much Jack has had so far; enough to loosen him up quite a bit anyway. He remains silent, allowing Jack to say what he needs to. “Such a damn waste too, seems cruel to give one of them that kind of talent. I mean they’ve just been letting him hide out teaching when he could be so *useful*, he has been before, and now….” Jack trails off and Hannibal hears him drink again. Hannibal swaps the phone to his other ear, tilting his head a little as he looks at the empty glass in front of him.

”Jack, what’s really going on? Is Will in trouble?”

Jack snorts. “Ha! No, I don’t think they’re going to charge him or anything like that, I mean Hobb’s *did* try to kill that omega girl. No, they’re just going to take him away from *me* and I need him. Eugh…” Jack makes a disgusted sound and then Hannibal hears him drain his drink and slam the glass down.

Hannibal sits upright, Jack’s implication of ownership over Will brewing up something inside Hannibal’s gut. “They’re removing him from the bureau?” asks Hannibal.

Jack grunts. “Probably, maybe, I don’t know...he’s not going to be allowed in the field. There’ll be an evaluation, which he’ll probably fail. He’s so *unstable*....unless….I don’t know, they’ll probably let him teach, which does nothing for *me*. I need him, I have to think about it, just make them let me have him full time. Ugh, why does he have to be *good* at it, too good. I mean...” Jack babbles and trails off into silence for a few moments. Hannibal listens quietly, his mind moving through and analysing Jack’s drunken line of thought. “It is you doing the initial report Hannibal, you’ll be fair to me right? On his evaluation? You can tell me, how has he been?” The muscles in Hannibal’s jaw tighten as he considers the implication of Jack’s words.

”It’s really not appropriate for me to discuss a patient with you Jack.” Jack doesn’t need to know that Hannibal has been waiting for Will to come to him, that Will has yet to make any kind of approach in the days since the shooting.

”Oh come on Hannibal, it’s just Will. He’s happy speaking with you then?” Hannibal closes his eyes in annoyance and takes a deep calming breath.

”Jack, I feel it’s appropriate for you to go home to your mate, preferably in a taxi.” Jack is silent apart from the sound of the phone being moved, possibly to be caught between ear and shoulder. “I will submit the report to you as requested, the report will deal only with Will’s ability to do his job.” Hannibal stands up and moves to the phone cradle, sitting out on the countertop.

”Hmm, okay,” says Jack softly. “Guess I just didn’t want to head home yet.”

”I’m sure your mate is concerned Jack,” offers Hannibal, hovering near the counter. “And if you truly need Will for your cases, I’m sure my report won’t make any difference no matter what it says.” Jack makes a rough growl in his throat. Hannibal smiles to himself, satisfied at Jack’s response.

Jack sighs and then, sounding suddenly tired, says “It is getting late I guess. Just…never mind.” He tails off, distracted by something. “Sorry for calling so late,” he mutters, as though he suddenly realises the time.

”It’s fine Jack, go home to your mate and of course, do please extend an invitation to come to dinner to her.” Jack just grunts in acknowledgement before he hangs up the phone. Hannibal looks at the phone in his hand before he places it back in it’s charging cradle. How interesting. He leans his hip against the edge of the counter, thinking through the conversation. He considers the things Jack meant to say, the information he allowed let slip in his tone and word choice. It’s all very interesting, all things he can use on Will. It will be so entertaining to have Will open up about work, about his version of events.

Hannibal smiles and pours another glass of wine. The day his wait for Will to make the choice to approach him ends will be very sweet indeed.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you to all my readers for your support!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Alana is silent mostly, apart from their brief hello, they haven't spoken. The dogs run ahead through the trees and Will kicks his shoes into the dirt as they walk through the woods. He keeps his hands in his pockets, watching the ground and avoiding the tension he can feel in the air between them.

Eventually Alana speaks, "So Will, are you going to talk to me about why you're doing this to yourself?" Will's head snaps up and he looks at her, shaking his head and frowning before he's even opened his mouth to respond.

"I didn't *choose* this Alana."

"I'm sorry," she says softly and they walk on in silence for a few paces more. Will bites his lip before huffing out a warm breath into the cool air. "I just...I want to understand why you went back to it, I mean, I thought you *liked* teaching."

"I do Alana," he says, smiling as Winston comes darting back to him before sprinting off back into the trees again. "I just had to, it's not like I had a choice. I was able to help…I think I did." He doesn't say anything more, it's not necessary, Alana is too good at reading him anyway *and* he's fairly certain Crawford has been asking her questions about him behind his back. He doesn't mind too much, he knows she would have been fair to him.

"Yeah...you did," she says thoughtfully. "Though you know, if you're feeling pressured to work on something…."

Will frowns at her and she stops. He knows where she's going. Oh she'll put in a good word for him, get him working somewhere else, somewhere with fewer alphas in charge. He knows what he's good at, he knows where he can be of the most use. He also knows he doesn't trust himself to be anywhere else, his anger needs to be controlled. Alana likes to view the academic life through the rose tinted glasses of someone who just hasn't been on his side of things, hasn't felt the urges he's felt. She'd think things a little different if she spent any time at Quantico as an omega, as someone with his abilities.

Alana smiles wide and turns towards him and he knows when she's about to change the subject. She grabs his forearm. "You should visit Abigail, she asked for you when she woke

up.” Alana is the only one who Will allows to touch him this way, she’s one of the only people he trusts and she’s never treated him like an *omega*. Alana has always put up with his problems, what most would term personality defects. It sometimes makes him wish he were a beta so he might be attracted to her, she’d be *safe*.

He smiles but doesn’t answer, thinking that yes, maybe it has been worth it. Abigail is doing well as he’s heard, she’s going to recover, physically at least. They walk on, Alana’s hand dropping back to her side. Up ahead Buster and Minnie bark excitedly, probably over some small unfortunate creature running for its life right now. The silence grows comfortable and Will is grateful, it’s one of the reasons he enjoys Alana’s company.

Eventually the sense that he owes it to Alana to speak to her about it all wins out. “They’re probably going to force me to go back to teaching anyway,” he says. “I shot an alpha *and* Crawford hates me.”

Alana looks up from where she’s watching the ground in front of them. “He doesn’t hate you,” she says quickly. She pauses at his frown. “I mean, he respects your work Will, honestly, he does.” Will rolls his eyes and she shakes her head. “I get it, you two don’t get along but...yeah, he respects the *work* Will.” He finds that hard to believe.

They fall back into silence, the only sounds the barks from up ahead, the noises of the forest, the sound their feet make. Will is glad she doesn’t prod him about whether he *wants* to do the work. She knows about the darkness but one of Alana’s best qualities is that she knows when to leave certain things be. He’s not even sure if he looks forward to being back in the classroom or not. He kicks the loose dirt again, throwing up a lump of soil into the air.

”So, I’m sure Crawford and Doctor Lecter have spoken to you about me, since it happened.” Will remarks and Alana stops walking turning to look at him.

”Well Jack has, of course, and I told him that he was out of line.” She puts a hand on one hip, frowning at him. “And Hannibal is an old friend, it’s perfectly natural he’d ask about you.”

Will sighs. “What’s his angle then? Since he’s such an *old friend*, what’s his deal?”

Alana smiles at him, shrugging. “I don’t know, why don’t you tell me? He seemed pretty interested in *you*,” she says, her voice going low. Will’s eyes widen.

”What?” He frowns at her. “That’s not even funny Alana.

”Worth it, for that look on your face,” says Alana brightly, punching him playfully on the arm. “Come on, lighten up! Hannibal is an experienced psychiatrist, who cares if he’s an alpha, he’s a professional. It’s policy you have a psychological evaluation after an incident like this, why not Hannibal?” Will’s frown doesn’t budge and Alana sighs at him. “Not every alpha has it out for you Will,” she says gently. “You know maybe if you were just a *little* more accommodating….”

”Oh please don’t,” he snaps, cutting her off. “I just...no, Alana, no. I don’t wanna hear it.” He stuffs his hands in his pockets and stomps across the ground quickly, moving ahead of her. She has to jog to catch up, grabbing on to his arm.

”I’m sorry Will, I just...you don’t have a choice sometimes, you know you have to work *with* what you have. If you can’t change the world you can at least try just living in it at least.” Will wants to be angry at her. He wants to but he knows she’s right, life probably *would* be easier if he was some stupid simpering omega, even if he would hate himself for it. Life would be so much easier if he was able to just stop seeing everything wrong with it all the time, not that he can see *that* happening any time soon. Alana smiles at him and falls back into step beside him. Another thing he likes about Alana is that she puts up with him when not many others do. It’s the only reason he apologises to her.

”Sorry,” he says quietly. “I know you mean well Alana, it’s just hard dealing with feeling so powerless over things.”

Alana doesn’t say anything and they fall back into silence, listening to the sounds their feet make on the ground as Will’s house comes into view through the trees.

”You really should see Abigail, they’ll be discharging her from the hospital soon. I’m not sure who is going to be taking her in. She’ll probably spend time in an outpatient facility for a while first though, while the decisions are made.” Alana says, pausing and watching the dogs race, zig zagging back and forth. Will comes to a stop and turns to look at her.

”Thought she was almost eighteen,” says Will absentmindedly, turning to do a quick mental count of the dogs. They’re all accounted for.

”She’s also an omega who hasn’t known anything other than a pretty traditional alpha-headed household,” says Alana. Her tone and words are completely reasonable but it still makes Will grit his teeth in frustration. He had learned to take care of himself, there’s no reason Abigail couldn’t too, no reason she can’t make her own choices. Not that she’d want to, any argument he could make for living as a solo omega wouldn’t sound too compelling coming from Will.

”I wouldn’t call murder and cannibalism *traditional*,” says Will. They make their way up the steps and knock the dirt from their boots before Will opens the door and the go inside. Alana is the only human being who has seen his place. He’s not even shy about it anymore, he knows others would talk about his space behind his back but he trusts Alana not to gossip.

”You really should see her though Will, Hannibal has visited you know.” Will looks up at that, the surprise evident on his face. “She seems rather smitten with him actually.”

Will frowns at that, the image of the much older Hannibal and the young girl putting a sour taste in his mouth. Alphas could be so disgusting sometimes. His thoughts must be clear on his face because Alana raises her eyebrows at him. “Oh come on Will, he saved her life and he’s a strong alpha in a position of authority, it’s perfectly natural she might have a little crush but don’t worry, he wouldn’t ever do that.”

Will shakes his head and heads to the fridge to get a drink. He’s not sure about the sick feeling in his gut, must be the image of an alpha going after an omega less than half his age. Alphas really could be such pigs sometimes. “So how come Hannibal doesn’t have a mate then? If he’s such a *strong alpha.”*

Alana laughs. “Oh I see,” she says, smiling at him. He makes a face at her.

”Oh ha, ha, yeah, *that's* why I'm asking. No Alana, I'm just curious.” He pours juice for himself, holding up the carton to offer a drink to Alana. She shakes her head to decline.

”No thanks…you know you could go and *see* him, in a professional capacity, like you were supposed to. They're going to make you see *somebody*, at least Hannibal was there, he knows what you've been through.” She says pointedly before her tone turns thoughtful. “Actually I don't think Hannibal has ever had a mate. I mean he's had relationships I'm sure, he's got a lot of good qualities. I'm sure he's in demand.” She leans against the counter, reaching down to absently scratch Winston's ears. “You know, I've never really thought about it. I guess you're not the only unmated mystery running around.” Will rolls his eyes.

”Not much of a mystery,” he says softly. “Just unstable.”

”Maybe you should ask him why he doesn't have a mate,” says Alana, ignoring his comment. Will doesn't respond. They're both quiet but it's okay. Will sips his juice and watches Alana focus her attention on the dogs moving around their feet. He knows Alana worries about him, worries about the darkness but thankfully, at times like this, she leaves it be. He hopes she knows that *this* is what he needs, not being analysed and prodded. He thinks she does know, she's so good at making things feel normal.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> And a second chapter, because I felt like it! Make sure you go back and read chapter 9 if you're just joining us this evening! My beta is really flying right now :D Go go go! So hopefully I can do more double posts soon :)
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Jack Crawford isn't particularly interesting to Hannibal. He's an alpha in a position of power, he's overly aggressive to his subordinates in a misguided effort to maintain that power. He prefers working with betas rather than with other alphas and he has difficulty being objective when it comes to omegas. It didn't take Hannibal long at all to have a clear picture of the man worked out. Still, he's FBI and has access to all kinds of things that Hannibal would find of interest, particularly Will Graham.

Jack brings his mate to their dinner, slightly unexpectedly but Hannibal is always over prepared when it comes to dinner. Jack introduces her as Bella and she hesitates when Hannibal takes her hand. She's elegant and reserved and she smiles and jokes with Jack when Hannibal is out of the room in the kitchen. She's exactly the kind of omega an alpha like Jack would want on his arm. Hannibal wonders what she's like in private, when she's not playing a part for Jack's benefit. In public she's poised and there's no doubt she acquits herself perfectly in social situations. It's all about Jack's job then, all about impressing the *right* people.

Hannibal finishes plating dishes, fixing every last detail of each and every serving. It's perfect and he enjoys the looks of awe on Jack and Bella's faces when he arrives into the room with the plates, balanced on his forearms and holding the sauce boat in one hand. "Hannibal this looks incredible," says Jack as Hannibal places the plate in front of him.

"Oh yes, it's beautiful," says Bella politely, picking up her wineglass to take a drink.

"Loin served with a Cumberland sauce of red fruits; strawberries, raspberries, currants," says Hannibal with a flourish. "Dinner is served." He seats himself at the head of the table and Jack and Bella raise their glasses to him.

Jack immediately begins cutting into the meat, tasting it and nodding in approval. Bella is slower and smaller in her movements, smiling politely the entire time.

Jack swallows a mouthful of food and picks up his wineglass. “So Hannibal, do tell, how are your sessions going with Will? He’s cooperating?” Hannibal smiles indulgently at Jack’s nosiness.

”As I’ve said before, I don’t think it appropriate to talk about a patient like that, it’s unethical…and let us not mix business with this meal I have prepared.” Jack snorts into his glass before taking a drink.

”Doctor Lecter, my husband seems determined to talk about his work but I’d love to hear about *you*,” says Bella quietly in the silent moment. Hannibal turns to her, sees the measured calm expression on her face. It’s clear why Jack would have chosen her, she’s *good.*

”Of course, what would you like to know?” Hannibal replies, cutting off a piece of meat and savouring it as he watches Jack and Bella exchange looks, one of the silent conversations that mates seem to be able to share.

”Well Jack has been telling me that you’re a psychiatrist, that must be an interesting profession. Is that what you’ve always wanted to do?”

”It is indeed interesting,” says Hannibal, looking down at his plate as he cuts another sliver of meat. “Though not the field I started out in, it is the one I have grown to love. The human mind is a fascinating place...though I fear to say more would bring us back to business.” Hannibal looks over at Jack and smiles, the expression not reaching his eyes. Jack shrugs.

Bella ignores this and continues on, seemingly determined to get some kind of polite dinner conversation going. “But still, studying the human mind must make casual conversation strange, I imagine you’re analysing me right now?” She laughs softly, polite laughter. Hannibal’s smile remains frozen on his face.

”It’s true it’s difficult to turn it off,” he offers, pouring more wine into his glass. “Though don’t fear, I see nothing more than the delightful mate of a new friend.” Hannibal raises his glass to Jack. “It’s rare to see such a suited mating, I can see why you chose each other.” Jack’s expression softens as he looks at Bella and Hannibal is glad at the shift in focus. He’s started to question Bella’s interest in him. He has to wonder if Jack put her up to getting some personal information out of him. It’s all confirmed when Bella turns back to Hannibal again, with more questions.

”So Doctor Lecter, as a successful psychiatrist with incredible skill in the kitchen,” she looks down before shifting her eyes to glance sideways at Jack. “I have to ask, do you not find omegas appealing?” Jack pretends to be surprised but Hannibal can read how false it is.

The silence grows uncomfortable before Jack feels the need to break it. ”I’m sorry Hannibal, that’s none of our business.” Hannibal smiles. He’s certain enough that Jack isn’t in any way *sorry* for the lapse in social etiquette. He put her up to this particular question after all.

”I don’t mind Jack,” he says before turning to look at Bella. “I find some of them rather enchanting, like yourself.” He raises his eyebrows at her and she ducks her head, patting her lips with her napkin. “Of course I simply have not met someone compatible. I am rather stuck

in my ways by this stage," he offers apologetically and thankfully Bella does as expected and laughs politely at the implied joke.

"So is Will coming to you like he's supposed to?" asks Jack, suddenly. The comment is so out of the blue that Hannibal pauses for a moment, considers that Jack hopes to catch him so off guard that he'll simply answer.

"As I've said before Jack, it would be unethical for me to discuss a patient with you."

"He's only a patient because I sent him to you, he *has* to see you if he wants to keep his job, he doesn't have a *choice*," says Jack firmly, staring at Hannibal. He's clearly trying to intimidate but such a silly trick isn't going to work on him.

"I will say, as a psychiatric professional, that I feel duty bound to point out that blackmailing someone into therapy tends to negate any positive benefits."

"This wine is really wonderful," says Bella suddenly, breaking the stare going on between Hannibal and Jack. Jack looks away first, smiling at his mate and agreeing with her that Hannibal's choice in wine is really top notch.

"I'm sure Will is going to be a difficult case, he doesn't want anyone fixing him," says Jack, another attempt to shift the conversation. "But he's ready to go back, I want him back in the field." Hannibal puts his knife and fork down, lacing his fingers under his chin and propping his elbows beside his plate.

"You're the one who asked me to see him," says Hannibal, his voice carefully measured. "He must be more useful to your investigations than you've allowed him to believe." Jack frowns at him. He must think he's far more stealthy with his actions than he truly is, Hannibal thinks. Jack's agenda is clear as day to Hannibal; solve cases, gain approval, and if he needs Will to do that, so be it, as long as it doesn't reflect badly on *Jack Crawford*.

"Are you not accustomed to broken ponies in your stable?" asks Hannibal, locking eyes with the other alpha. The room is quiet as Bella places her knife and fork down too, quietly watching them both.

"You think Will's a broken pony?"

Hannibal smiles at Jack's question. "I think *you think* Will's a broken pony. You ever lost a pony, Jack?" Jack's eyes narrow.

"If you're asking if I've ever lost someone in the field, yes. Why?"

"I want to understand why you're so delicate with Will. Because you don't trust him or because you're afraid of losing another pony?"

Jack wipes his face with his napkin, sitting back into his chair and putting his hands on the table. "First of all, Will's an omega, I can't trust that *he* knows what's best for himself and second, I've had *my* psych eval." Hannibal smiles at the response, returning his attention to the scraps left on his plate.

They eat in silence, the odd polite compliment to the food and Bella's strained attempts at neutral conversation notwithstanding. It's clear enough to Hannibal that Jack has suddenly realised the issues revolving around his unmated omega subordinate. He wonders if Jack's superiors have already made mention of concerns or if Jack is jumping the gun. He waves the thoughts away, enjoying the flavour of the meat in front of him too much to think overly long on Will's work situation.

Hannibal clears plates and he catches a glimpse of a private toast between his guests from the doorway. Jack smiles fondly at Bella and she reaches across the table. They touch hands briefly and Hannibal wonders what it must be like to be so weak. Things are better without attachments after all, easier, less messy. After the fun has been had, there are always complications. In the end it's usually easier to simply terminate the problem.

As Jack and Bella get their coats to leave, Jack pulls Hannibal aside a moment. "I'll make Will see you, he doesn't have a choice, he'll be over as soon as possible." Hannibal looks at his face, the man looks gravely serious. "No arguments, make him cooperate if you have to, he's in the only department that can take him, it's where his talents lie. His evaluation stopped being optional when he pulled that trigger."

Jack and Bella leave and watches them go; the disapproving look Bella flashes at her mate over the roof of their car. She is all smiles as she turns to wave though, the perfect omega. Hannibal closes the door and he is left wondering how he can spin all this to Will. So much for waiting for the omega to come to him of his own volition, now it seems he'll have yet another roadblock to overcome to connect with Will.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

So glad so many of you are still enjoying this!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal's office is quiet when Will arrives, the waiting room empty. He stands in the doorway of the unlocked outer door for a minute before venturing inside. The lights are on, *he* is here. Will takes a few moments to steel himself before he knocks on the inner door.

There's no voice from inside, instead a moment passes and the door opens, Hannibal standing tall and imposing in his perfectly tailored suit. "Will," he says, sounding surprised but the smile on his face reads pleased. Will clutches the jacket in his arms against his chest.

"Doctor Lecter, I'm sure Agent Crawford has informed you that I'd need to make an appointment with you," says Will softly, looking at where the light from inside the office falls onto the floor of the dim waiting room.

Hannibal steps to the side, gesturing for Will to enter the room. "I can see you now Will," says Hannibal smoothly. Will has to fight the urge to turn and run to his car as he walks into the office. Will looks up as he passes the alpha, takes in the room around him, high ceilinged and ostentatious in its decoration.

"I won't take up much of your time," says Will before he realises his mistake. "Of course, I suppose that's up to you." He looks over his shoulder at Hannibal closing the door. The frustration and despair that's been gnawing at him since Crawford's phonecall bubbles up in his gut a little.

Hannibal moves to a chair, seating himself before he even looks at Will. He gestures to the empty chair opposite. "Please, sit, let's be honest here Will, this is Jack's doing." Will bites his lip, frowning at Hannibal's reaction. It's as though he's just as upset over the whole thing, which, Will reasons, might be because he doesn't want to be bothered this time of the evening. It's too late now that he's here though and Will moves to the chair, awkwardly seating himself, legs together and to one side. He doesn't lean back, perching uncomfortably on the seat.

Hannibal leans back, crossing his legs. "So Will, if you wish for me to tell Jack that you're fine to go back in the field, I will happily do that for you, though I must say, it's most likely out of Jack's hands."

”You’d rubber stamp me?” asks Will, smiling at the absurdity. Then the rest of Hannibal’s words register and Will leans forward a little, tilting his head. “What do you mean it’s out of Crawford’s hands? Crawford wants me out of the field either way, this is all so he can sleep soundly at night knowing he didn’t *make* me shoot Garret Jacob Hobbs.” Will says the full name, as he’s been doing in his head since it happened. He shakes off the flash of Hobbs’ face, staring at him as he bleeds out on the kitchen floor.

”I believe Jack thinks if you know your value to him, he might lose control over you. Not that he ever had it….” Hannibal tails off and smiles at Will. “I believe Jack needs your skills and he fears more that you will be taken out of the field by those above his head who appreciate your talents even less.”

Will catches himself looking into the alpha’s friendly eyes and looks away, digging his fingers into the jacket folded on his lap. “Well don’t I feel special,” says Will, “all this special consideration and none of it leaving any of the decision making about my work in my own hands.”

”Believe me Will, it would be better for us to talk under different circumstances, but let me be open with you, Jack thinks of you with condescension not through fault of his own but because he does not have the control over his biology that you or I do. It would be as fair to blame him as it would to blame the cat for killing what it catches.”

”Sounds like you’re excusing him, excusing every alpha who has ever looked down on an omega,” Will says, looking Hannibal in the eye without reservation. The anger bubbles inside his gut but he manages to remain outwardly calm. “You can’t blame me if I find that hard to swallow.”

Hannibal purses his lips as he looks at Will, studies him. Will lets his eyes wander instead, looking at the bookshelves and artwork placed around the room. “It makes you angry when alphas follow their instincts then?” asks Hannibal, breaking the silence.

”That sounds far too much like a leading question,” says Will, narrowing his eyes. “*Now* this sounds like therapy.”

Hannibal laughs, shifting a little in his seat. ”I simply mean, are we not all in some way ruled by instincts out of our control? Could we not all be blamed for our biology as we could for our need to breathe and eat?” Hannibal tilts his head, looking at Will in a way that makes Will feel more awkward and uncomfortable than he already was. He shifts, pressing his hands into his jacket and pressing his legs further to the side.

Will looks at the alpha in front of him, his calm demeanor and blurts out his thoughts. ”You control it.”

”Control what Will?” Hannibal asks, narrowing his eyes a little.

”You don’t stare me down, don’t let me smell how much you want to push me down and...you know, alpha behaviours, you don’t do them.” Says Will quickly, looking nervously away.

”You assume that on some level I feel the urge to stare you down and...do other things and that I am making a conscious choice to suppress them,” says Hannibal. His voice is that of a therapist, fishing for further information. Will frowns as he feels his face grow hot. He looks back at Hannibal’s questioning face.

”So you’re telling me that either every other alpha out there wants to dominate omegas so badly they can’t be blamed and you’re the exception? What is that supposed to mean Doctor Lecter?”

”Call me Hannibal, please Will,” says Hannibal smoothly. “And I must question you, is it truly *every* alpha who has treated you this way or simply the ones you’ve upset?”

”Oh of course, it’s all my fault again,” says Will sarcastically, shifting his weight closer to the edge of the chair, every muscle ready and wanting to get up and *leave*. The constant implication that *he* is the problem just feels like a slap in the face, maybe he expected more from Hannibal. “It’s enough alphas that it shouldn’t matter.” Hannibal is an alpha too, he has to remind himself.

Hannibal makes a soft noise and taps a finger against his lips as he looks off to the side. “So then Will, it is not your nature that causes your problems but your talents and the positions your superiors place you in.” He breaks the silence with a thoughtful voice. “Perhaps that is what your evaluation should say.” He looks at Will expectantly.

”You’re asking for my opinion on what you’ll say to Crawford?” asks Will suspiciously. He can sense that Hannibal *must* have an ulterior motive here. “You’re serious, you’ll actually rubber stamp me? You’re giving me a choice?”

”Indeed I am Will, either way.” Hannibal threads his fingers together. “Either you’re fit for the field or you’re only fit for teaching, it’s up to you. It will be your choice. You get to do what you want without guilt or questions and our conversation can continue unobstructed. ”

Will realises his mouth is hanging open and closes it, snapping his teeth together. When it had been Crawford deciding what was to be done with him, Will had wanted nothing more than to take whatever the opposing path would be. The urge to rock the boat just a little too strong. Suddenly, with the ball in his court, Will is at a loss. He dreams of having all of the options, of having a *choice* in his future and when he gets it now it’s too much to handle. He looks around quickly, looking for inspiration, as though the correct decision will be written out on a cue card for his perusal somewhere in the room.

”I could help to save people,” Will says softly, weighing up the options in his mind. He looks at Hannibal. “Don’t I owe them that?”

”You don’t owe anyone anything Will,” says Hannibal, looking right back. “I can see your talent in your work, your abilities, but they cost you dearly, don’t they?”

Will bites his lip before he sighs in defeat. “It doesn’t matter what they cost, I owe it to do what I can, I don’t have a choice.”

”And I repeat myself Will, you don’t owe anyone anything, least of all some faceless, nameless other. In this instance, you decide.”

”Abigail Hobbs might say otherwise,” says Will, frowning and looking at the floor.

”Perhaps you should visit her and see what she thinks,” says Hannibal. He unfolds his legs, swapping sides, and recrossing them, leaning back into his chair. Will remains perched on the edge of his seat, tense. “Do *you* feel as though you owe Abigail something?”

”I killed her father...You were there, you saved her *life*, you don’t feel any obligation to her?” Will snaps in frustration.

”I do indeed Will, I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I feel a great amount of responsibility towards her.”

”And how much of that is your biology Hannibal?” Will shifts himself back into the seat, relieving some of the tension in his legs. “Would things be different if you weren’t an alpha, if Abigail wasn’t an omega?”

”Will, what is the point in speculating on that question? You seem determined to pinpoint which of my actions and behaviours are due to instinct and which are choices. In the end, does it matter?” Will frowns, letting the words sink in as Hannibal continues. “Ultimately, the behaviours are the same, regardless of where they stem from.”

”So you don’t believe that there’s somewhere that *you* end and your instincts begin?” asks Will, curious and confused in equal measure.

”What’s to be gained from speculating Will? If such a boundary exists within us, who is to say where the line lies?”

Will frowns at the rhetorical questions. “So you’d argue that Garret Jacob Hobbs’...*need* to kill those girls is as much a part of him as his instinct to protect his daughter?”

”Yes, though I don’t think your argument is compelling,” says Hannibal, voice measured and calm, unnerving Will in it’s evenness. “Mister Hobbs killed for fun did he not?”

”No,” says Will, frowning at Hannibal’s calm face.

”You don’t think he enjoyed it?” Hannibal asks, raising his eyebrows a fraction.

Will is silent, trying to wrap his head around Hannibal’s words. It’s true, on some level – hadn’t Hobbs enjoyed it? Hadn’t every single monster he’d ever been inside the mind of? He’d felt their joy at taking life. Still, it was an uncomfortable subject. Hannibal seems to ignore Will’s silence, settling back into his chair, smiling at Will’s thoughtful face.

”Killing must be enjoyable, did you enjoy pulling the trigger? Did you enjoy killing Hobbs?” asks Hannibal, leaning forward and looking Will in the eye. Will looks away.

He doesn’t want to think about it, doesn’t want to wonder if he chose to pull the trigger, if he *wanted* to take a life. He doesn’t want to admit to enjoying it. Instead, he stays silent, looking

off to Hannibal's side. Hannibal sits back in his seat, perhaps satisfied.

They fall into a silence that grows a little more comfortable eventually, despite the air of unease and dark thoughts in Will's mind. They watch each other, study one another. Hannibal's eyes take him in but for once Will doesn't really mind the alpha's roving gaze. It doesn't feel lecherous or calculating, just curious.

It's some time before Will finally works his way up to standing up, unfolding his jacket from his arm and putting it on. "It's been interesting Doctor Lecter...Hannibal."

"It's a disappointment to see you go Will, I hope we could speak again sooner rather than later." says Hannibal, standing as well. He walks Will over to the door and opens it for him. "Drive safely and please, when you've decided what I should tell Jack, let me know." Will bites his lip, pausing in the doorway, the problem that's since drifted to the back of his mind the only thing he can think about once more. His thoughts must be obvious because Hannibal smiles at him and speaks again, voice soft. "Whatever you choose will be the correct decision."

Will hopes he's right. He thinks it over the whole way from the door to the car, driving home, spends the rest of his evening contemplating it. But no matter what direction he sways with it, he keeps coming back to another question entirely, *why*. He wonders what it is that's prompted this from Hannibal, wonders if the alpha is up to something, if it's all a trick. It's not a usual alpha play to give an omega so much agency like this, it's all so unexpected but Will is too tired and worn out to *want* to think it over. Instead he cuddles with his dogs and lies in bed. Eventually exhaustion overtakes him and it's visions of feathered stags and Garret Jacob Hobbs grinning face that fill his mind instead.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> Two chapters again today so make sure you go back and check out chapter 11, it's an important one! Enjoy :)
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

”It’s been some time since your last visit,” says Bedelia, crossing her legs. She sits back in her chair, elegant and composed. She doesn’t express any outward emotion over the situation; it’s something Hannibal has always admired about her.

”You know how it is, striking a work life balance,” says Hannibal, getting comfortable opposite her. She smiles at him, a measured expression where the corners of her mouth raise just a fraction, intentional and calculated to lighten the mood.

”There’s usually something particular on your mind when you visit,” she remarks. She sets her hands in her lap, looking at him expectantly. “Or a someone,” she adds, as though it’s an afterthought. Hannibal knows it’s not, the woman is far too careful with her words for that.

”Insightful, yes, it’s someone, an omega, his name is William.” Her eyes widen for a fraction of a second before she schools her features once more.

”It’s not like you to be so open about things from the start Hannibal, usually you’re much more particular about what you say….” she trails off, looking over to the window. “I must admit, I didn’t see think I’d ever see the day an omega would finally catch your attention.”

”You say that as though an omega catching my attention is particularly meaningful,” says Hannibal, studying her face closely. She doesn’t reveal much but Hannibal can speculate about the feelings any talk of omegas might stir up. She never has gotten over the loss of her own.

”It’s as inevitable as the sunset,” says Bedelia, her voice quiet. “We all fall eventually.”

”You see it as falling? And it’s interesting your thoughts move to love so soon.” Hannibal says, narrowing his eyes at her. She continues to look out the window. “No, this omega is interesting to me not as an object of desire but rather as a fascinating specimen.”

Bedelia’s eyes return to Hannibal’s face. “I pity him then,” she says coldly. “Love or lust, it doesn’t matter.”

”And those are the only choices?” asks Hannibal.

”Where omegas are concerned.”

They are both silent for some time, watching each other. Hannibal considers Bedelia’s words, not necessarily her truth, merely intended to evoke a response from him. He wonders if her unresolved feelings for her own lost mate might be colouring her opinion of omegas in general.

”What if I simply wish to befriend Will Graham?” asks Hannibal and Bedelia smiles that knowing calculated smile of hers.

”And after friendship?”

”That’s it, you don’t see the possibility of being friends with an omega?”

”Not for you, not with an unmated one, not while unmated yourself Hannibal...it will always lead to something more.” She says, crossing her legs the other way, rethreading her fingers together on her lap, shifting her whole body into a mirror of her previous position. She continues to study his face.

”You make a lot of assumptions,” says Hannibal.

”You’re more obvious than you believe yourself to be,” she retorts, smoothly and effortlessly. Bedelia has always been such a fascinating companion, able to match him, it’s always so nice speaking with her. Hannibal smiles.

”So you believe that if I befriend Will that I doom myself to inevitably falling prey to sexual desire.” Hannibal watches the way Bedelia shifts uncomfortably at the word *sexual*. He waits for her to respond, watches her think through her words carefully.

”You want to play a game with this man, you want to manipulate him,” she holds her hand up when he opens his mouth to respond. He shuts his mouth and she continues. “I know you Hannibal, you believe yourself above these mortal desires. You want to have your fun and walk away but Hannibal, if he’s caught your attention after all these years of no interest in omegas at all? Then it’s already too late.” The thought makes Hannibal uncomfortable. He’s the smartest man in the room, the one holding all the cards. The thought of his own biology being a weakness is something he’s never considered, not with his control. This must be how *normal* people feel, realising they are fallible. Hannibal remains silent, letting her words sink in. It’s a testament to the esteem he holds Bedelia in that he allows the words to sink so deep.

”You believe that you can simply play your games and not have to deal with the consequences,” says Bedelia, a strange and thoughtful look on her face. She tilts her head to the side. “I never thought I’d see the day. I wonder if this can possibly end well for this Will of yours, when you’re finished with him.”

”He’s not mine,” says Hannibal. The *yet* hangs in the air, unspoken. Bedelia smiles again, a fraction more of a smirk this time.

”Perhaps it’s Will who manipulates you, whether he knows it or not.” She flicks an invisible spot of dust from her skirt. “None of us are above our instincts Hannibal, even you….You make me nostalgic for my courting days.”

”You’ve never felt the urge to return to them then?” asks Hannibal, curious about something he’s always considered below him.

Bedelia gets a far off look in her eyes, turns to look out the window once more. “You’ll understand it when you’re mated Hannibal, it *changes* you.”

Hannibal isn’t sure if they’re the words of a lovesick alpha or the truth that Bedelia Du Maurier is usually so good at seeing. “And if my intention is simply to help him live up to his potential?” asks Hannibal.

”What kind of potential is that?” she asks, her face abruptly returning to that impenetrable mask.

”He would be something very special, if he accepted what he is.”

”And what is that? As an omega? Or as someone like you?” She doesn’t elaborate any further, she doesn’t need to, they both know what she means. “He is not the only one who needs to accept what he is.”

Hannibal isn’t sure what she wants him to think about this, be it his alpha nature or the darkness he knows that she senses. She hides it well but he sees her suspicions, her discomfort. She matches him well but he can’t share everything with her, and how wondrous it would be to have someone to share it with. He ignores the budding scenario in his mind until it sinks back into the shadows.

”You think you’ll change him, but it is you who must change,” Bedelia says, watching him intently. “There is no choice here for you.”

The words amuse him and Hannibal nods as though agreeing but he thinks on her words and decides he does not. Everything is a choice, every game a series of calculated decisions. It is Will who doesn’t have a choice, the irony of it being the very illusion of a choice that Hannibal is using to draw him closer. Will’s lack of choice frustrates him, Hannibal’s endless choices exhilarate him.

Hannibal chooses to play his games and Bedelia makes at least one point she may not intend. Will is an omega, one who Hannibal will have his fun with. Perhaps the most fun would be to make him fall for an alpha when he so clearly despises the thought. He does not agree with Bedelia’s assessment of things though, he controls his own nature more carefully and thoroughly than even Will believes he does.

As well matched as Hannibal and Bedelia are, as much as Hannibal appreciates her insight, he knows he doesn’t need to take all she says as truth. After all, she doesn’t know Will, hasn’t *seen* him, couldn’t appreciate his darkness the way Hannibal does. She simply wouldn’t understand how different this situation is to anything she knows. After all, Hannibal thinks, if

things ever appear out of his control, if the game ever tilts out of his favour, he can always make the choice to kill Will Graham.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all my readers, you guys are awesome!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the amazing job she's doing as my beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

After the hectic pace of the previous days, being back in the classroom feels so quiet and still. It's so familiar that it's almost boring. The way the students react to each slide and sentence, each question, all the same. It's all become a single great homogeneous experience. The minutes run together and Will can't help but long to be back out in the field. The costs associated don't make it to the image in his head as he pulls at his tie yet again.

Between classes, Alana phones him. She knows his schedule well enough, and she times her call just right so they can chat for several minutes about innocuous topics. It's clear to Will that she's checking up on him, though on whose authority he's not sure. It's all very *safe*. The whole day feels so very safe. It's a far cry from his other choice.

It is a choice, Hannibal has made that clear, that it will be up to him. It would be all too easy to say yes or no, but not so much to live with the consequences. If he goes back into the field, he'll have to deal with Crawford, he'll have to be the unstable omega who can't handle the work. He will have to encounter the darkness every day and he'll definitely add more things to the list of reasons he can't sleep soundly at night.

Saying no has it's own problems. He'd be a coward and it's the one thing he's always known himself not to be. Taking the easy path has never been Will's style. Even if Hannibal would be the only one to know...Will still doesn't want to do it, doesn't want even Hannibal to think he's a coward. Even if he never sees Hannibal again, the thought of him knowing that he walked away, that Will couldn't take it, makes Will's stomach tie itself in knots of worry.

It's Beverly Katz that calls, passing on the message from Crawford, asking him to come to her lab as soon as possible. Will is fairly certain she edited the exact words of Crawford's message into a far more polite format. He goes anyway, even though he doesn't want to, even though he wants to hide away and ignore everything that's going on around him. He goes because they need him.

The bodies are still in bags and one of the techs, Zeller he thinks, says quietly that Will doesn't want to see them. Will frowns at the black body bags and the words. Dead bodies have never disturbed him as much as the monsters have. It's typical for them to *assume* he

just can't handle it. He's never given them any reason to suspect he couldn't but even betas have their biases.

Will looks at the photographs of the crime scene and the bodies. Beverly and Zeller stand watching him study the images when Crawford and another tech, the same one that worked Elise Nichols' body come into the room. It feels all too crowded and uncomfortable with four sets of eyes on him.

Will is numb, looking at the photographs of bodies more fungus than human. The musty smell of soil and mushrooms permeates the lab, even through the heavy duty body bags. "They were buried in a high nutrient compost," says Beverly. "Whoever did this was seriously encouraging decomposition." Will frowns at the photographs, going through them again, looking at the shots of the bodies, lined up next to their shallow graves.

"No restraints?" asks Will, frowning at the photographs.

"Just dirt," says the other tech, making a face. "Looks like we disturbed someone's mushroom patch." Will racks his brain trying to remember the man's name.

"What are you thinking then? What do you have?" says Crawford, his voice sounding angry and impatient. Will glances sideways at him, catches his glare and looks back down to the pictures in his hands.

"This is a lot of work…" Will says, absentmindedly, staring at the pictures, his mind drifting away, thinking about what *doing* this might have felt like. Crawford makes an annoyed impatient sound. "I don't bind him," Will says, his voice barely above a whisper. "I bury him in a shallow grave...alive but he will never be conscious again." Will swallows reflexively. "He won't know that he's dying, I don't need him to." The excitement settles into Will's stomach and makes him feel sick. He shakes his head, trying to clear the images out of his head but it's an exercise in futility. He closes the manilla folder over on them instead.

"Come on Will, tell me, who is it, why do they do it?" Crawford asks, his voice still with that impatient edge. It doesn't work like that but Will doesn't think saying that to him will accomplish anything.

"I don't *know*," Will says, quietly. Crawford makes that stupid noise again, a rough growl of annoyance in his throat. Will's grip on the folder tightens reflexively and he has to remind himself not to crumple the photographs. He puts them down on the table.

Will looks at the expectant faces, watching him. His gaze slips across Crawford swiftest of all. "I...I don't know," Will repeats and he turns to leave the room. He's halfway out the door when Crawford's hand grabs his upper arm, too tight.

"Will, stop! Where do you think you're going?" Crawford sounds as though he's admonishing a naughty child and the condescension of the whole thing makes Will feel more angry than disgusted.

"I just...I can't, not, I…." Will freezes for a moment, his brain trying to put into words exactly what he's feeling, trying to verbalise something that Crawford has a hope of at least

understanding. It doesn't come together.

"First the Hobbs thing, now you can't even look at pictures of bodies?" says Crawford, his grip loosens on Will's arm and Will pulls it free.

"It's not the pictures," says Will softly but it's as though Crawford hasn't heard him.

"God damn it, I need you to be able to do this," says Crawford and Will finds certain pieces of his confusion fall into place. It seems Hannibal's words had at least some truth to them; Crawford might not want him to know it but he *does* need Will after all.

It's not that Will isn't willing to do the work, it's just the feelings when he looks at those photographs...it stirs something in him that he'd thought was long buried. It sickens him but it's not something he can say to Crawford, not if he wants to get out of this with any kind of dignity. "Maybe I can focus on a different case," offers Will, thinking of the demons he already has in his head. "The copycat, Cassie Boyle, the girl in the field." There's only room for one feathered stag to stalk him after all.

"Oh come on Will, seriously? You're still hung up on that copycat theory? Can't you just leave it be? There is no evidence and you're already on shaky ground after killing Hobbs. Just get back to this case, you don't have a choice." And Will's stomach drops like a stone at Crawford's words. The information is there, all the evidence and yet Crawford would still rather brush it under the rug and ignore it. Better to stick his head in the sand than try to track a killer that even Will said would be near impossible to catch. It seems that Crawford would rather a murderer go on killing than believe an omega. Shooting Garret Jacob Hobbs is going to haunt him forever, both in his dreams and his professional life it seems.

"I have to go," says Will and he turns, rushing from the lab before Crawford can say more, before he can start accusing Will of *enjoying it* like Hannibal had. But Hannibal hadn't so much accused him as asked him the question, hadn't he? Will's walking pace slows as he swipes his security pass and leaves the lab area, moves down the faceless corridors that make up the building.

When Will gets to the phone he knows he only has one choice, but it's a choice and it's *his* so he's going to take it. He picks up the phone and pulls the card from his pocket, dialling the number and listening to it ring. On the fourth ring the man on the other end picks up.

"Hello Doctor Lecter, I'd like to talk to you about your evaluation of me," says Will, his voice far calmer than he feels. "I've made my choice."

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

A big thank you for all the support guys! Another double post today so make sure you read the previous chapter(s)!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

”I...didn’t have anyone else to talk to about this,” says Will, when he shows up at Hannibal’s office. Hannibal ushers Will inside, glad to see him but not showing it. After their brief phone conversation earlier in the day, Hannibal knew it would only be a matter of time until Will would drop by. Hannibal knew Will would want to reassure himself that he had made the right choice.

”Will, it’s nice to see you,” he says as he seats himself; watches Will’s uncertain shuffling movement to the empty chair opposite. Will looks around the room, eyes shifting from one place to the next.

”I...I didn’t know if I should come,” says Will uncertainly. “I just...I guess I just realised that I have no friends outside of work. I mean….” Will looks up for a moment before ducking his head again. “That sounds pathetic,” he says, his voice low and barely audible.

Hannibal considers things for a moment. He weighs up reassuring Will and pushing him down lower, carefully of course, measured so his hand won’t be visible. It’s tempting but Will’s mood is difficult to gauge, especially after the short exchange on the call earlier in the day. Ultimately Hannibal does what he always does: what he *wants* to do.

”You’re having second thoughts about leaving the field?” asks Hannibal. Will bites his lip nervously, looking at the floor.

”I don’t know,” he says, quiet enough that Hannibal leans forward to hear him.

”You’re torn between what is best for you and what you think is best for the world,” Hannibal offers and Will looks up at him, startled.

”You’re a few steps behind me,” says Will, his lip once again going between his teeth. He sighs then, squeezing his eyes shut tight for a moment. He looks at Hannibal. “No matter what I do, it’s the wrong choice.”

”But your choice nonetheless,” offers Hannibal. Will doesn’t respond right away and Hannibal takes the time to study him - his messy hair, the glasses, his unkempt facial hair, the

soft comfortable clothes he favours. The contrast between Will and the lavish surroundings of Hannibal's office is intriguing and Hannibal can't help but let his mind linger on the visual for a moment.

"Hannibal?" says Will and Hannibal looks at his face, sees the questioning, earnest look there. How can someone so pure have so much darkness inside? It's a mystery that Hannibal wants to jump into with both feet. "Why can't things ever be easy?"

"The hard path can be the most rewarding," offers Hannibal. It's cryptic but Hannibal enjoys the look on Will's face as he absorbs the words. "To be happy we should do what *makes* us happy, no?"

Will's eyes narrow and he looks Hannibal straight in the eye. "That would mean getting to have a choice and I don't, it's all a fucking illusion. Fuck that, fuck *you*," says Will, his whole body trembling perhaps more than he thinks it is.

"You're trying to goad me, to test me," says Hannibal, looking at his nails, giving the perfect impression of the utmost indifference. "Though I'd prefer you not use that sort of language Will." He looks up at the quivering omega in the chair opposite. "It's very *rude*."

Will collapses back into his seat, as though the energy has been completely sucked out of him. "Sorry," he mutters. Hannibal smiles but Will is too busy looking at his own hands to see it.

"I worked out in the field before," says Will, his voice quiet, gaze fixed on where he picks at his cuticles. "Helped close some really bad ones you know, back when I was with the police. I had a lot more leeway, wasn't the only omega then but I was the only one who got involved with that kind of case, got a chance to really prove myself." He sighs. "I didn't realise what it does to you back then…thought it was just the constant fighting that was wearing me down, always having to argue my case to be allowed even get *near* a crime and I thought things would be better with the FBI, not *worse*. More alphas the higher you go and it wasn't just the fighting, it's so much more than that." Will looks up from his fingers and into Hannibal's interested face. "Every time I go inside the mind of a killer, I take a little piece back with me and it's dragging on me like a noose around my neck."

"Your darkness extends deeper than you've let anyone know?" asks Hannibal, thinking about Will's personal relationships. Only Alana comes to mind and...Hannibal doesn't let the thought go any further.

"I guess, I just…" Will stares at a point past Hannibal's shoulder. "I figure, why give them more reasons to think the worst of me, it was always enough of a fight just getting to look at the case files. Even after I contributed to closing my first few, it was always like I still had to prove myself to everybody, all the time. They really wanted me behind a desk or better yet at home, where a good omega belongs." Will sighs, dropping his head down, shoulders hunched. "And now I don't think it makes a difference any more, it's all out of my hands anyway. I just want to stop fighting, for a little while. It's futile anyway, nothing I do makes a difference."

"That's not true...Is that why you asked me to report you not fit for working on active cases?"

Will looks up at him. “I can *help*, they just won’t let me...won’t let me decide if I do or don’t or…” His voice trails off and he shakes his head. “I’m not even sure what it all means, just...I feel so powerless here. They won’t let me work the cases when I’m able to and now it’s hitting me and they want me back? It’s not fair, not getting a choice.”

”Do you think that is because you’re an omega?” asks Hannibal. Will frowns before looking down at his hands.

”You don’t see how omegas are treated? Alphas seem to enjoy making our decisions for us, since we’re so stupid.”

Hannibal ignores the words and decides to change direction. “Perhaps a break from work would do you good? A holiday as it were.”

Will looks up at Hannibal briefly, shaking his head then looking back down. He’s at least comfortable enough looking Hannibal in the eye now, though he doesn’t do it nearly as often as Hannibal would like. The thought of the progress he’s made in such a short time sends a thrill of excitement up Hannibal’s spine.

”I made that call while I was angry, don’t they always say not to make decisions while you’re angry?” Will picks at his fingers again. Hannibal wishes he could tell him to stop but it wouldn’t be wise to give orders right now.

”If you’re wavering between two options sometimes you need emotion to make a decision for you,” says Hannibal, crossing his legs, focusing on projecting calm to Will. Will doesn’t respond, staying frozen in his head down position.

They sit in silence and Hannibal considers how to proceed with Will, wonders which path will result in the most interesting results. Giving him the illusion of self-determination has already done wonders and Hannibal is eager to see where it leads.

”Crawford doesn’t even believe me about the copycat,” says Will, his voice sounding small and rough. “Well, maybe he does but he doesn’t *care*.” Will looks up. “Makes you wonder if anyone actually *cares*.”

”People have a habit of looking after their own interests foremost,” says Hannibal, watching Will’s reaction. He looks up, surprised at Hannibal’s reaction.

”At least you admit it,” he says, voice low again, the fight gone out of him again. “Makes a refreshing change I guess.”

”I only state the truth. What good is it to deny such a basic fact of nature?”

Will snorts a little, a sarcastic puff of air through his nose. “As far as I can tell, you and I are the only ones who can accept that.”

”And how big is your frame of reference?” Hannibal asks. Will just gives him a dirty look in return. Hannibal leans forward a fraction. “You haven’t talked about how you’re feeling with Doctor Bloom?”

”Alana wouldn’t understand,” mutters Will, folding his arms over his chest. Hannibal wants to smile at the thought that *he* is the one Will chose to speak to. “She sees the best in people…and I see the worst.”

”And me?” asks Hannibal, curious. Will looks at him, cocking his head to the side as he looks at Hannibal’s face.

”What sort of person you are? I haven’t decided yet.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

They cut back his classes, not that his lecture schedule had been particularly packed before. He's only teaching the basics to the new recruits now but Will is swiftly running out of the desire to care. Just being in the building is draining now. Will spends as little time as possible outside of his lecture hall, just in case he runs into someone he doesn't wish to speak to.

He doesn't want them staring at him with that look on their faces. He doesn't want to hear them talking about him. He has a good idea of what's going on, the reviews and arguments and debates over just how stable he is, just how useful he is. A group of people Will has never met who'll be deciding his future for him.

It wears on him and he wishes he could let it all out. He'd talk to Alana about it but she just doesn't get it, she never really can understand it, not everything. It's all a big tangled mess that Will can barely scratch the surface of himself, he doesn't think anyone will *ever* get it, not really. Still, he wishes he could talk about it. He resolutely pushes the one person he *could* speak to about it out of his mind.

Alana suggests he visit Abigail for what must be the tenth time in as many days. Will finally relents, thinking that he'll perhaps watch her, see her from a distance. He hopes seeing her alive, recovered, *whole*, might do something for his own problems. He doubts it though.

Abigail is recovered, physically. Alana has been talking to her, treating her, for all the good she can do. Seeing your parents die, knowing what her father had done, Will wonders if it's even possible to recover from something like that. It all makes his own problems seem stupid.

He wanted to go and see her and for her to not see him. He wanted to drive out to the idyllic little private outpatient facility that Alana has her squirrelled away in. He wanted to stand in a doorway and maybe watch her for a minute and then leave. Alana is there and she waves him over and Will holds his breath as he greets them both, sitting in the deserted visitors room. There are clusters of chairs everywhere and they're furthest from the door, the space between the open doorway to their spot seems to take forever to cross, Abigail staring at him the whole time. She smiles shyly and ducks her head. Will lets out a breath of relief when she doesn't point and call him a murderer.

”Hi Abigail, I don’t know if you remember me…” says Will, talking quietly, unsure how she’ll respond. He doesn’t like talking to victims, even ones he’s had a hand in saving. Abigail tilts her head and smiles at him, eyes big and her face open

”Of course I remember you Mister Graham,” she looks sidelong at Alana for a moment. Alana pats her shoulder. “I wanted to thank you but Doctor...Alana said I had to wait for you to visit.” The way she speaks sounds a little coached but Will wants to believe it’s genuine. Either way, Alana had a hand in it and she’s not one to advise her patients poorly.

”I um...sorry about that,” says Will, watching the way Abigail blushes and pushes her shoulders up. “Please, call me Will...and I’m glad to see you doing so well.”

It’s awkward and both the omegas in the room are too shy to speak much. Will is certain their reasons are entirely different for that. He knows he should be trying harder, should be leading the way, giving Abigail a good example. He’s sure he’s coming across as a typical submissive omega now with Alana attempting to drive the conversation. She avoids talking about work which doesn’t exactly leave much for them. She brings up Will’s dogs though, and thankfully they pass some time talking about them. Abigail’s eyes go wide and she smiles as Will tells her about each dog’s personality. She’s an animal lover too.

The conversation stops mid sentence suddenly, Abigail’s eyes going wide, fixed on the door. She breaks into a big smile and Will senses the man in the doorway before he turns and sees him.

”Hannibal!,” says Abigail, her voice high and excited, she jumps up from her seat, barely holding herself back. Will imagines her launching herself at Hannibal if he would have allowed that sort of thing. Instead she stands, hands pulling her long sleeves down over her fingers, her weight forward on her toes.

Hannibal pauses in the doorway, taking them all in, his face not giving away his reaction. Will awkwardly stands when he realises he’s the only one still sitting. Hannibal smiles at him and Will looks away. Will really doesn’t want to see him, not after stupidly spilling his guts to him.

Hannibal kisses Abigail’s cheek and she sits and smiles at him, her eyes not leaving him. Hannibal doesn’t touch Will, just a nod in his direction. They all sit down again, all eyes on Hannibal.

”So Abigail, I see you’re popular today,” says Hannibal amiably. He smiles at Alana, then at Will. Will looks away, glad that Alana is here for him to focus on instead.

Abigail pushes her hair behind her ear, her hand pausing at the scarf around her neck before dropping to her lap. “It’s so nice, to have everyone visit, thank you.” She looks at Hannibal the entire time she speaks and Will knows Alana is right about the crush the girl is nursing.

They’re silent for a while, looking at each other. Will doesn’t know what to say. What topic won’t inevitably lead to the fact that Will is the one that pulled the trigger on Abigail’s father? He squeezes the edge of his chair, looking around the room, occasionally catching Alana’s eye. He regrets coming today with every fibre in him.

”So Hannibal, how was your drive up?” asks Alana, clearly grabbing at straws in an effort to break the uncomfortable silence. Will looks to Abigail, can tell immediately that she’s too wrapped up in smiling at Hannibal to take part in the stilted conversation. Seeing her dreamy look, the way she sighs softly and tilts her head, it all makes Will feel a little sick, deep down in his stomach. Is it because she’s a teenage girl or are all omegas like this? The only omegas he knows are little more than passing acquaintances, the mates of alphas at work, not really *his* acquaintance at all. There are omegas everywhere and yet he does not enjoy going out, so how could he know them? His own father had not exactly been the ideal omega, hadn’t set a very good example. He’s seen such “perfect” omegas on television acting this way but Will is well aware that life is not like the movies. He logically knows he can’t blame her for it but he still wishes she’d *stop*.

He muses on the fact that he actually knows so few omegas in a real life basis. They’re all wrapped up in going everywhere with their alphas so it’s the type of crowd that Will would avoid, even if he did make a habit of socialising.

”Will?” says Alana. The way she says it means he’s missed something and she’s repeating herself. Will turns to her, surprised. She smiles. “Will, Hannibal and I were just saying, how about a walk? Some fresh air?”

”It’s a bit stuffy in here,” adds Hannibal. Abigail immediately nods, rushing off to get her coat. Will starts to wonder how long he needs to stay until it’s alright for him to excuse himself.

*****

They walk for a while in an awkward clump, the pathway eventually forcing them into pairs and differences in stride length opening gaps. Eventually Hannibal and Alana walk ahead and Will is given the opportunity to speak with Abigail, not that he particularly wanted it. She watches the alpha walking ahead of them and Will frowns.

”So, Mister Graham, Alana told me that you work with the FBI,” says Abigail as they trudge along. Up ahead, out of earshot, Alana and Hannibal hold their own conversation.

”Yeah, and please Abigail, call me Will, no one calls me Mister Graham.” They walk another few paces, Abigail worrying her lip between her teeth.

”She said that you blame yourself…” her voice goes very quiet and Will’s breath catches. “and I don’t want you to, you didn’t have a *choice* and my father...he...he did bad things.” Will is silent, his heart pounding. He didn’t want to talk about this today, he *never* wants to talk about this. It’s not his choice though, and he’s certain enough that the alpha and beta walking ahead would both agree that he should deal with it now.

”I’m sorry,” he says, at a loss of what else to respond with.

”I don’t blame you,” Abigail says, pushing her hands into her pockets and turning to look at him for a moment before looking down at where her feet hit the gravel path.

”Still, I’m sorry all the same,” Will says, “for everything.”

They walk a little further, the only sound the crunch of their feet against the gravel, the occasional laugh or audible speech from the two walking ahead. At least they seem to be enjoying the walk and conversation.

”Hannibal is nice,” says Abigail and Will realises he’s been staring at the two ahead. He ducks his head before reminding himself that he doesn’t need to feel ashamed in front of a teenage omega.

”Yes, I heard he’s been to visit,” says Will, his voice a little harsher sounding than he means it to be. If Abigail notices his tone, she doesn’t say anything.

”Oh yes, Hannibal has been telling me all about his travels in Europe, and he likes the opera and art and...he’s very, *sophisticated*.” She says it without a hint of irony and Will smiles at her simple way of seeing things. She’s easily impressed but her naivety seems sweet rather than something Will would normally scorn.

”He’s also old enough to be your...” Will trails off, suddenly aware of what he was going to say and the inappropriate timing of bringing up the topic of parents. Abigail is quiet and Will immediately feels bad for saying it. “I didn’t mean,” says Will.

Abigail touches his arm gently. “It’s okay.” She shakes her head. “I know he’s older, he’s just nice, that’s all,” says Abigail. “Anyway, I bet he’s already got some fancy lover somewhere.” She giggles, then puts her hand over her mouth, cutting off the sound. “Sorry,” she mutters. “I guess it’s not the time to joke….”

It might never be the time to joke, thinks Will, but he doesn’t say it. He thinks about Hannibal’s *fancy lovers* and wonders if she’s right. It would make sense, even if only before they’re mated, it’s pretty much expected that an alpha will have taken lovers, to sow their wild oats. It would be odd if Hannibal *didn’t* have someone, somewhere. Will frowns to himself and blames his discomfort of the idea on the ridiculous double standard of how alphas and omegas are expected to act outside of heats and mating.

They walk for a bit and it’s actually nice, now that Will isn’t watching Abigail watch Hannibal. They walk in the quiet and when it gets chilly they circle back around and follow Hannibal and Alana back inside the hospital building. Abigail complains to Alana about having to stay here and Alana pats her shoulder. Things are quiet and relaxed. He says goodbye to Hannibal, a small awkward wave, no physical contact, and Hannibal insists he come to dinner soon and then Hannibal is leaving. It’s only when Will is saying goodbye to Alana, giving her a quick hug, that he realises that he’s not even thought of his problems in a while. Maybe getting out of the house isn’t so bad after all, he thinks.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> I am absolutely amazed by the response this fic has gotten! This has over 10k hits now, the first time a fic of mine has gone over *6k*! And my highest kudos on a work ever too! You guys are amazing, I'm just glad people are enjoying this story.
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal closes his eyes, conducting the music in the air a moment before smiling to himself. He returns to chopping the onions, preparing to make his supply of stock for the week. His movements synced up with the music coming from the speakers. He's relaxed in the simple pleasure of it all. The telephone ringing is an unwelcome intrusion into his little bubble but he pauses the music, answering it rather than let it go through to voicemail.

"Hello?"

"Hannibal! It's Alana," the voice on the other end says, unnecessarily, Hannibal recognises her instantly.

"Doctor Bloom, so nice to hear from you." Hannibal picks up the remote and pauses the music, leaning on the counter with his free hand. "I do hope this is a simple social call."

"Of course Hannibal, though...you're expecting a call from Jack?" Her voice is hesitant, confused. Clearly she doesn't have any information on cases that Hannibal could dig into. It's a pity.

"It was nice to see you yesterday, Abigail seems to be recovering well," says Hannibal, neatly distracting her.

"She's a mature young woman," says Alana, "She's handling it so well, all things considered, surprisingly well in fact."

"She's got the best care she possibly could," offers Hannibal, picking up the knife from the cutting board and tilting it to see the light reflect off the blade onto the surface.

"She's the one doing the hard work," says Alana, her voice cheerful. "She's not why I called though, I...I was hoping we could talk about Will."

"I thought this *was* a simple social call," says Hannibal, his eyes narrowing. He puts down the knife. "Is it appropriate to discuss a patient with another professional who just so happens

to be said patient's friend?" Not that Hannibal would have any moral issue with it, he just likes knowing every side first.

Alana laughs softly. "Oh come on Hannibal, lighten up, I'm calling as Will's friend….and I hope you'd talk to me as a friend…a *mentor*." Hannibal's face softens as he trails his finger across the glossy surface of the countertop.

"Of course Alana, you're worried about Will as a friend, considering what's happened, I can't blame you." He hears her sigh on the other end of the phone. "What is it?"

"I just worry about him, more than usual lately," she says and Hannibal hears some noise on the other end of the line and a door closing. "Sorry about that," she says, her voice lower. "Will's cut back on lectures, he's not taking new cases which...okay, I'm frankly happy about. It affects him you know? He tries to cover it, but it's obvious that the cases are hard for him. He cares about the victims too much, I think he feels like he has to keep going, even when Crawford and the rest of Behavioral Science is pulling him back and forth and arguing over whether he should be allowed to. It's not fair; he worked so hard to get into profiling in the first place. He can be pretty stubborn." Hannibal quietly listens, absorbing all the information she gives him, both intentionally and not. "Sorry for putting this on you, I just...I was hoping you'd understand," she says. She sounds tired.

"Of course I understand Alana, he's your friend and you need to talk about it...with someone you can trust," he adds the last part and takes her silence as agreement. Alana would make a good ally in his game with Will.

"I'm just a worrier," she says with a small forced laugh. "I suppose I should be relieved that you've recommended taking him out of the field. Jack is going to fight it, tooth and nail. It's like it doesn't matter what's best for Will."

"I have done what's best for my patient, I have to, I don't have a choice in that," says Hannibal, running his finger along the back of the knife, turning it to catch the light again. "Beyond that, I have no control over Jack's actions."

"Jack puts his needs first and Will needs all the…" Alana pauses a moment, clearly coming up with just the right word. "...*friends* he can get….I would have made the same recommendation to Will but then I don't think we'd be friends anymore if I did."

Hannibal smiles. "You think he'll be willing to come and see me then? Even after taking him out of the field?" asks Hannibal. He doesn't need to ask her, he knows that Will returning to see him is inevitable, Hannibal is the only one who *understands* after all.

"I don't know Hannibal, I...I would like him to, I think you can be good for each other. It's important he meets alphas outside of work. The people drawn to law enforcement...well, they tend to be a certain type, as much as I hate to generalise."

"Is Will that type?"

Alana laughs again. "Oh you bet, he's as stubborn as any of them. Still Hannibal, thank you for working with him, I'm sure he's driving you crazy."

”Not at all, I find him fascinating, he can be delightful when he wants to be,” says Hannibal absently looking at the vegetables he’d been chopping, calculating how much more he’ll need to prepare once he hangs up the phone.

”Actually it’s funny, Abigail was asking about the two of you yesterday, wanted to know what’s happening between you,” Alana says, her attempt to sound casual not enough to cover her words. “I mean, *I* didn’t notice anything but Abigail seemed to be under the impression that Will was...the word she used was *crushing* on you.”

”Is that so?” Hannibal keeps his voice even, neutral.

”Yes...I mean I just thought it was funny. Abigail doesn’t know many adult alphas *or* omegas. She’s probably just, you know, she’s young.”

”Indeed,” says Hannibal.

”Um, anyway,” says Alana, into the awkward silence. “I mean, it’s probably just her reading into things, and I shouldn’t have even brought it up.” She laughs nervously. “So much for a friendly chance to catch up, though I’d love to do that properly some time.”

”Of course,” says Hannibal, leaning his hand on the counter next to the waiting chopping board. “I’ll have to have you and Will both for dinner soon.”

”That would be nice, thank you Hannibal and...good luck, with Will I mean, thank you, I…” she tails off for a moment and Hannibal considers cutting her off with a farewell. She speaks once more. “I hope things work out, with Will, he needs people who care about him.”

”I’m not sure what you mean by that, but thank you,” says Hannibal. He knows exactly what she *thinks* it means. Alana isn’t being as subtle as she perhaps believes herself to be. She must know Hannibal can see right through her attempts to push them together. Not that he needs her help in the matter.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> 2 chapters posted today, make sure you catch both! A big thank you for your amazing support guys, this now has my most hits and kudos on a fic ever! :)
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will plays with his dogs, chasing them and playing tug o' war and fetch and generally enjoying the opportunity to forget how things are for a while. It's as if his own mind doesn't want him to forget though, and he has to shake his head to clear the image of the stag stalking him through the trees. He glances away and back again, and the feathered creature is gone, but the memory of it refuses to leave his mind. The dogs bark for the tennis ball and Will throws it half-heartedly.

The weather has started to get cooler and Will pulls his jacket a little tighter. He watches the dogs run back, Winston the victor with the ball in his jaws. They bark excitedly when Will tries to get the ball back. He throws it harder this time, farther, so he can watch them run. Life is simple, for a dog.

Will watches them play for a while before he heads back to the house. He pushes his hands into his pockets, pausing for a few minutes longer, trying to appreciate the dogs' joy at simple play but failing miserably. Will goes inside.

His house is dark and quiet and Will has to turn on the light quickly before something sneaks into the corner of his vision. He shrugs off his jacket and stands still, listening to the muted barks of the playing dogs outside.

When he bought this house he'd appreciated the quiet, had liked being alone, away from society. Now he just feels isolated and cut off. He feels it deeply, in more ways than one. The loneliness he's pushed down inside cuts at him sharply. Will goes to the phone and picks it up, hesitates a few seconds before dialing the number from memory.

It rings three times, before being picked up and the out of breath Alana speaks. "Hello?"

"Hi, it's Will, sorry if it's a bad time."

"Oh no, it's okay," says Alana, a forced upbeat tone to her voice. "What's up?"

"I...I shouldn't have called," says Will quietly, wondering where he even got the courage to pick up the phone in the first place.

”Will? It’s okay, tell me what’s wrong, should I come over?” Alana sounds worried and it makes Will feel even more foolish.

”No I just, I guess I was feeling a bit…*lost*.” Will sits down on the couch, toeing off his shoes and stretching out his sock covered feet.

”One of those days?” asks Alana.

”Try one of those months,” says Will, biting his lip. “It’s just all this stuff with work, and just...I guess my career in general. It makes me wonder what i was even fighting for.”

”You wanted to help people, and you did Will, you’ve saved lives, look at Abigail.” Alana’s words tumble out and it all feels a little false, too eager to placate him. Will wonders if Alana has practiced it, or at least thought that she would be delivering such a speech to him.

Will makes a quiet noise that Alana can take as agreement if she wants to.

”You can go back when you’re up to it, I mean, if you can do it with a better support structure.” Alana sounds overly cheerful to Will’s tired ears. He sighs and sinks deeper into the couch cushions.

”Yeah, I guess,” says Will. “If I even get a choice.” His gaze wanders around the room. He really should tidy up but then, he’s not expecting any visitors.

”You could talk to Hannibal about it,” suggests Alana, sounding hopeful. Will knows that Alana was Hannibal’s student. She’s known the older alpha for a lot longer, so she’s probably spoken to him. Will wonders if Hannibal has been sharing their few brief conversations with Alana. He’s an interesting *study subject* after all. They could write a paper on him or something. Will curls his toes into the rug and grits his teeth.

”I might,” he says, clenching the muscles in his jaw. “We’ll have to see if I want to keep seeing Doctor Lecter.” It’s obvious to Will that he sounds angry, Alana must hear it a mile away.

”I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry, I just got the impression that you two were getting along and I...I wanted to say that I thought it would be good, for both of you.” Alana’s voice takes on that reasonable tone, the one she uses when Will is in a bad mood. It never does work to improve his mood.

”What good is him putting up with me?” Will rubs his eyes. “I’m no good to anyone right now.”

”I wouldn’t say that….” says Alana, tailing off and pausing for a moment. “Just, take my word for it.”

Will rubs at his eyes again, suddenly realising how heavy they feel. The heaviness sinks into his whole body and he turns to lie on the couch. He wonders if Alana is just toying with him and then has to remind himself that Alana isn’t that sort of person. Then the thought comes to him again, Alana and Hannibal go way back, who is to say she’s not plotting with him. Will

shakes his head, trying to clear it of the crazy thought. He's not paranoid, he tells himself, it must be just the tiredness, the stress that's been going on for a while now.

"So then, you think I *should* keep seeing him," says Will, a yawn forcing it's way out of his mouth.

"Yeah," says Alana quietly. "I can hear you yawning, guess you had a late night?" He hasn't but it's better for her to think that, he doesn't want her worrying about him any more. "I'll talk to you soon Will, maybe see you at Quantico." Will nods before remembering that she can't see the movement.

"Uh, yeah sure Alana, that'd be nice." He hangs up and drifts off.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal's appointments seem to go by slowly. Franklyn in particular is tiresome today, far more than usual. Perhaps it's simply one of those days, or perhaps it's that his final appointment is one he's actually looking forward to.

Will is early, Hannibal recognises his scent from the waiting room, layered under that horrific cheap cologne and he resolves to find an excuse to give him something better. Something that complements Will's natural scent would be perfect. Hannibal already has ideas to consider.

Will looks tired. It's the first thing Hannibal notices when he opens the door, how worn out he looks. Will has only mentioned his nightmares once, a brief comment in passing that he quickly changed the subject from. Hannibal wonders if the nightmares are so bad as to cause the dark circles under Will's eyes.

Will smiles, a little forced but at least some hint of genuine happiness underneath and Hannibal ushers him into the office. They sit and Hannibal takes in Will's appearance. His shirt is wrinkled, he looks even less well turned out than usual.

"I thought I was going to be late," says Will, looking tiredly up at Hannibal. Hannibal narrows his eyes, scenting the air carefully. He wonders if Will is ill or if it's simply exhaustion. There's an undercurrent to his scent that's too subtle to pick out from the complexity of Will. Perhaps he is coming down with something.

"I would have waited for you," says Hannibal. "You're my last appointment for the day."

"Does that mean I can stay as long as I want?" asks Will and he forces a smile. Hannibal returns it.

"Of course Will, I would like to think you are starting to enjoy your sessions with me at least a small amount?" Hannibal decides to press Will, hoping his tiredness might help Will be a little more open.

"Oh yes, yes," says Will absently, leaning back into the chair and squeezing his eyes shut before opening them wide. "Sorry, just, haven't been sleeping well…actually, I just seem tired a lot."

”Are you ill?” asks Hannibal standing up. Will shakes his head. Hannibal sits back down, reluctantly. “I am a doctor William.”

”Since when do you call me William, Doctor Lecter?”

”I only worry about your health Will, believe it or not, I would like the best for you.” It’s a lie of course, Hannibal doesn’t want the best, he wants the most...interesting.

Will makes a noise that might be agreement, he leans his head to one side. “So then Hannibal, what great insight do you have for me today? Time for me to accept that the world is a fucked up place where I have no control over my own destiny and therefore I’ll never be happy?”

”If you believe that’s what I’ve told you then you’ve not paid attention to what I’ve said,” says Hannibal. He frowns, perhaps Will *is* ill, he does look rather pale. “You can definitely be happy Will.” Hannibal isn’t so sure he believes the words himself but he says it anyway. Even if Will is beyond saving, his destruction can at least be a spectacle in and of itself.

Will grunts in acknowledgement, his eyes tracking across the floor. “So what, if I accept that I’m the lowest of the low, that everyone trying to decide my life for me is right and I should just be grateful, then all the darkness, the nightmares will just go away?” asks Will, frowning at a random point on the rug.

”No,” says Hannibal firmly. “Firstly you’re not the ‘lowest of the low’ as you put it, and secondly, perhaps your world is a little too small for you to truly see the big picture.” Will looks up at Hannibal briefly before looking back at the floor. “Perhaps you should spend more time outside of work,” says Hannibal. “Spend time in a less...toxic atmosphere.”

Will shakes his head. “The whole world is toxic Hannibal, it’d be easier if I couldn’t see it but I’m just not that kind of omega.”

”You do not have to ignore the problems you see Will, there simply comes a time when we realise we do not hold the responsibility for every wrong we see in this world. To accept your nature does not mean happiness. We are all responsible for our own happiness, are we not?”

Will looks up from the rug and frowns at Hannibal. “So it’s my fault if I’m not happy? It’s my fault the world is fucked up?” His voice reveals all the frustration and anger inside him. Hannibal considers poking him, for the entertainment, but only for a moment.

”There are many things in this world Will, some of the darkest of which you’ve come into contact with. There is surely a point at which you can choose to let go and live your own life. You can choose whether or not to take the problems of the whole world inside yourself.”

Will bites his lip and Hannibal wonders if he would dare argue the point. Will shakes his head and sighs. “No, I suppose it is a choice, though how freely made it is may be up for debate,” he says softly. He looks in Hannibal’s eyes. “There’s darkness in there pretty deep though. Some things, once you see them, you can’t forget them.”

”We ignore bad things all the time, just to get through our day; we all do it to some extent Will,” Hannibal offers and he realises that for a moment what’s he’s doing, what he *wants* to

do, actually does neatly line up with what might be best for Will. Coincidentally, of course.

Will smiles with just one side of his mouth raising up. “Guess it’s easier said than done.”

”Indeed it is, especially when one sees the darkness so much clearer than those around them.”

Will nods in agreement, wiping at his eyes and yawning. “I don’t know why I’m so tired, just the stress of things I guess.”

”Perhaps,” says Hannibal, his eyes moving over the man in front of him. If he wants to play, wants to steer Will down a path to darkness, wants to possess him, he knows he’ll need to choose his actions carefully. Yet Hannibal doesn’t *want* to do anything else than send Will home right now, wants to tuck the tired omega into his bed and hope for him to get some rest.

”It’s a long drive back to Wolf Trap,” says Hannibal, standing up. Will looks up at him, his movements a little slow. Perhaps it would be the polite thing to offer Will accomodation, to insist he not drive like this. He knows it would do more harm than good, Will would simply see it as a poor attempt at seduction.

Will doesn’t argue at least, he stands and puts on his jacket and thanks Hannibal for his time. As he moves to the doorway, his scent tickles Hannibal’s nose. Hannibal uses the opportunity of Will’s tired and distracted state to scent his fill. Underneath that cheap cologne, underneath the rich heady scent of Will’s skin, underneath all the layers that make up Will, right there is something sweeter and more tantalising. Hannibal recognises it instantly, not as any illness but the first clue as to what’s in store for Will in the next few days. Will is going into heat.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Posting 2 chapters again! And hiding from you all! :P

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will feels the lack of sleep in everything he does. He takes too long to respond to students, and feels his own anger growing out of control at the way they're looking at him. He's not just the weird omega teacher, he's the one who was too crazy to be of any use on active cases. How long will the FBI put up with him before there's an excuse found to fire him?

The nightmares have been keeping him at night, making his waking hours feel dream-like. Will is starting to wonder where awake ends and sleep begins; the only difference he can see is when he's awake he just feels so deeply *tired*. He tells himself it's the stress of stepping back from cases, it's the stress from the sick feeling inside when he thinks about pulling that trigger and filling Garret Jacob Hobbs with bullets. It's dealing with the way everyone looks at him and simplifies it all down to a case of a stupid hysterical omega who doesn't know what's best for himself.

Will sits in the deserted lecture hall for a long time after the last students leave. He's too tired to move, too tired to even think about the long walk to the car park, the longer drive home. Home where his bed and the nightmares wait. He just wants to sleep, more than anything else, and yet it seems it's the one thing he can't have right now.

Will shuffles through the papers on his desk, putting things away. He opens his day planner to check where he has crossed out his old lectures and written in the new ones for the week. He frowns at it, there's something he's forgetting. He flicks through the pages, the thought creeping up the back of his skull. He doesn't want to believe it, doesn't want to think it until he's counted the months. Maybe it's not what he thinks, he's two weeks early and his heats have been like clockwork, four times a year since he was a teenager.

Will grips the edge of the table, frowning at the papers in front of him. Now that he's aware of it, he feels the cramping in his gut, the aching feeling in his body that tells him the time is close. He closes his eyes and shakes his head, too tired and worn out to deal with any of this.

On his way to his car, he can feel eyes on him, the kind of looks that he never cared about before. He was lying then, he just didn't want anyone to know they were getting to him, that it did matter. Will breaks the speed limit several times getting home.

The dogs welcome him but Will ignores them, pulls off his sweater and changes his shirt to something soft and cotton. It's already sweaty and unpleasant, his skin clammy. He can't remember the last time he felt so horrible before a heat.

Will picks up the phone, dials Alana's number and leans against the refrigerator door as the phone rings. The motor kicks on and he feels the hum through the muscles of his shoulder. Every nerve ending is heightened and he wants to kick himself for not noticing sooner. It's even closer than he thought it might be, another day, if he's lucky.

Alana's voice on the other end of the line brings Will's attention back to the phone pinned against his ear by his shoulder. "Hello, this is Alana Bloom, unfortunately I'm not available to come to the phone. Please leave a message or contact my office." Will waits for the beep.

"Hi, it's Will, sorry to spring this on you but I'm not going to be available for a couple of days. I'm not feeling well, nothing to worry about, you can call me back but please don't come over Alana, I mean it. Just…need some *personal time*." Will presses the button to hang up the phone but keeps it clutched in his hand. Alana knows the code, knows the implication. She will heed his warning and leave him alone. He pulls himself away from the fridge and stumbles over to the sofa, collapsing onto it.

The fabric of the couch cushions is too rough, almost painful along the strip of his back where his t shirt rides up. He wants to sleep, wants to doze off but he can feel everything, the greater awareness of things slowly ramping up from his approaching heat. It all makes him feel particularly miserable.

Will passes the phone back and forth between his hands a few times. There's someone else he should call to warn off, someone who Will suspects might show up if Will were to miss an appointment. Will's thumb hovers over the button to dial. No. He can't do it, his mind too tired and fuzzy, his control slipping. He doesn't want to dance around, he's too tired for their games. He just wants to sleep.

A growing part deep inside Will wants to call but it's not strong enough to overcome the deep exhaustion. Will feels as though all his energy has been sucked out, as though a vampire has already sucked him dry. He shivers even though he's not cold; if anything he's too hot now. Every symptom becomes magnified a thousand times when he notices them, or perhaps it's simply a sign that his heat is truly here. He's used to dealing with it, he has some *things* in a box under his bed, he'll do the best he can, but he simply doesn't *want* to. He's so tired he'd rather lie down and sleep forever, even if it meant never waking again, as long as it was a dreamless sleep.

Will puts the phone on the coffee table, turning on his side and curling on the sofa, aware of each rasp of the individual fabric fibres against his skin. Even the air feels heavy, pushing down on him like a weight. Everything swirls up inside, the darkness and his cursed hormones and his worries – it makes his stomach hurt. Will feels the now familiar headache behind his eyes, a hundred times worse now that he can't help but be so totally *aware* of his own body.

When his heat hits, he'll be alone, just like he has been for the last hundred. He curls one hand under his head and squeezes his eyes shut and tries to sleep, exhaustion dragging at him.

He’ll need to sleep while he can, before the heat fully wraps him up and drags him away. It’s only through the enormous desire for rest, built up over days, that he finally drifts off. He dreams about feathered stags and violence and death and pulling the trigger of his gun and sex and Hannibal’s face.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

2 chapters posted today, make sure you catch chapter 19 too!

Uh oh, I should hide!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal thinks about Will as he drives to out to visit Bedelia Du Maurier's residence. He thinks about how Will might be coping with his swiftly approaching heat, wonders if Will might find this one particularly difficult to deal with. He chases the thoughts away; mindless fantasies. The true test will be whether Will picks up the phone and calls, whether Will is already accepting what he is and the choice that he'll have to make.

Hannibal smiles as the car picks up speed, and he imagines Will by himself, legs spread with his hole wet and just *begging* to be made a true omega. As nice as the visual is, Hannibal forces himself to concentrate on the road.

Less sexual thoughts enter Hannibal's mind, such as thinking what it might be like to see Will truly transformed, wondering if Will would kill again – if he could only get a taste for it. The thought doesn't make Hannibal as happy as the previous one, but at least it doesn't distract him from driving as much.

He pulls on to progressively smaller roads until he reaches the house, stepping out of his car and straightening his coat. Bedelia opens the door before he knocks and he smiles at her. "Good afternoon Hannibal," she says without a hint of emotion. They walk into the small sitting room at the front of the house.

"How is that omega of yours coming along?" asks Bedelia before they even sit. Hannibal pauses to remove his coat.

"Straight to the point, aren't we," he says smiling at her blank face. His false emotions never have worked on her.

"I don't see the point in wasting time," Bedelia says, crossing her legs elegantly. "Life is short, after all."

"You know this better than most."

For the briefest of moments, Bedelia slips and a frown creases her face. Hannibal smiles at her and she looks past his shoulder to the window. “Since it is you who insists on continuing to visit, Hannibal, it’s your feelings we should be talking about,” says Bedelia firmly.

”My feelings about Will?”

”Yes.”

Hannibal watches her face, unmoving, staring resolutely out that window. She doesn’t even betray any of her tension in the muscles of her jaw, the way Will might. Bedelia’s control is the complete opposite to Will’s face, as every emotion plays out across his face before he’s even realised he feels it. “He’s going into heat soon,” says Hannibal.

It gets Bedelia’s attention and looks at Hannibal, her eyes tracking across his features. She might think he’s lying but she eventually looks him in the eye. “What do you plan to do about that?”

”Wait for him to come to me of course,” says Hannibal smiling at the thought. “The chase is fun but surrender is so much sweeter, don’t you agree?”

Bedelia purses her lips, narrowing her eyes a fraction as she watches Hannibal right back. “You think he will come to you then?”

Hannibal chuckles, a low laugh in the quiet room. “I don’t know, believe it or not, what Will Graham will do next.”

”No wonder this omega interests you then Hannibal,” Bedelia replies, tilting her head to one side. “Usually you’re the one in sole charge of your games.”

”Perhaps your insight into being an alpha is more accurate than I first thought then,” replies Hannibal, crossing his legs to mirror her position. A vague smile crosses her face.

”Our biology makes fools of us all, even *you*...you’ve never taken an omega in heat, have you? Never even gotten close to bonding.” She sighs and looks away, back to the window.

”Pleasant memories?” asks Hannibal. She doesn’t answer. “Unpleasant associations then.”

Bedelia frowns momentarily, another of her micro expressions so fleeting anyone else would miss it before her face is a mask once more. “Tell me Hannibal, how many lovers have you taken?”

Hannibal narrows his eyes are her line of questioning. “Enough.”

”Enough that you’ve seen everything, no doubt,” says Bedelia, her tone with a hint of sarcasm. “What was so special about them to catch your interest?”

Hannibal looks at her for a while, considering how to answer her question. To show her the truth of himself or to lie and hide it, either way, she’ll know. “I wanted to know them intimately, I wanted everything they had.”

”Possession then,” Bedelia remarks, swapping her crossed legs, breaking their mirrored poses.

”In a manner of speaking.”

”So this Will Graham…” Bedelia tilts her head as she says his name, watching Hannibal’s face, clearly trying to gauge any reaction he might have. “...you hope to own him.”

”I don’t think he would appreciate that terminology.”

She smiles at him and it doesn’t reach her eyes, it never does. “It’s not about what he desires though, is it? Not for *you*. For *you* all that matters is what *you want*.”

”So you think I wait for Will to come to me because it’s simply what I want rather than what is best?” he asks, already knowing that it’s the truth. She smiles that mask of a smile again.

”Of course, crawling to an omega wouldn’t be your style Hannibal. I imagine you’d prefer to create the perfect conditions for him to crawl to you and *beg* you to take him….the question is, when the time comes, what will you want to do then?”

”Perhaps in this case what I want and what will inevitably happen are the same thing,” Hannibal says. She tilts her head the barest fraction, so her hair slides against her shoulder.

”You’ll make him think it’s his choice, even as you pull the strings.”

Hannibal smiles and he knows he doesn’t need to add more. She understands his point of view even if she believes that he’ll inevitably fall by the way of simple biology. Hannibal disagrees but she doesn’t need to hear his argument. He knows they won’t come to any point of agreement on this topic. Bedelia’s lost mate weighs on her too much, tips her opinions more than she realises. It makes Hannibal pity her.

They talk for a while longer, all coded questions and responses. Hannibal hopes for insight into the loss of control, the weakness he might feel, wondering if there are ways to escape it short of death. Stopping the path he’s started down is not an option he’ll even consider. Bedelia must know what he wants but she doesn’t supply him with the words he needs. They shift around one another, an intricate set of moves in a dance they both know too well, until their time together comes to an end.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

> The question is, how much will everyone enjoy this chapter ;D We've not even hit the halfway point! Here's Will's heat :3
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It's all Will can do to feed the dogs and shut them in the spare room before he's collapsing back onto his bed. His body aches everywhere. It's not the achiness that painkillers might help, it's something deeper, more intense even than that. It's as though the very insides of his bones ache and it's all radiating outward from the empty feeling between his legs.

Will rolls across dirty sheets, his skin itching with sweat that doesn't have a chance to dry. His whole body hot and wanting. He arches his spine, pushing back to reach a body that isn't there and he can't help but scrabble blindly at the sheets, trying to get a grip on something, anything. If he had the ability to think he would be glad there was no one there to see him.

Will drifts through a haze of lust soaked dreams, his nightmares mixed with sensations that make the desire burn even brighter inside him. In his dream the feathered stag hunts him through the trees and Will stops running away, lays down and spreads his legs, arching up and waiting. He waits for something that never comes. He wants with all his being, wants so badly that he becomes nothing but his desire, his need. He wants so badly it hurts.

Will lies panting, his cock hard against his belly, straining against the fabric of his briefs, *hurting* where they rub against him. He can't even bear to touch himself, not at first. Even ghosting fingers against his flesh is too much. It's not until he's ready to burst out from his skin, that he feels as though he'll erupt into flames, that the agony of touch is preferable.

He tries to stroke his cock, to masturbate as he does most of the time but during a heat it's just not right, it does nothing more than tease. He strokes and he can't get any harder, can't get any closer to an orgasm.

Every heat is worse than the last, or at least it feels that way and this one is no exception. He sniffs the air, searching for the scent of an alpha, searching for someone to come and mount him, to take away this misery he finds himself in. The faces of every alpha he's ever known are in his head teasing him, and he hates them all for it. Just like every heat before, he tells himself never again, that it would be worth giving up his independence if only not to have to deal with this. It would be worth subjugating himself for this agony to end.

The dildo he keeps under his bed helps, but not much. Will is dripping wet when he slides it in, starts pumping the bulb to inflate the fake knot in a vain attempt to feel full. He knows it's not real but he closes his eyes and tries to picture a real flesh and blood alpha mounting him, taking him, filling him and knotting him. It doesn't work, nothing ever does and knowing that this heat will eventually come to an end doesn't do anything to alleviate his anxious desire.

Will's world is a haze of lust and itchy skin that scratching doesn't help. He pumps the dildo in and out of himself so fast and hard that it hurts, so far beyond feeling anything pleasurable. He groans and cries out and tosses and turns. He sees the stag at the end of his bed, watching him, and he spreads his legs, pushes his hips wantonly up, invites it to come closer, to take him, but it never does.

He calls out to it, but it's too far away and he begs it, but it doesn't listen. He wants it to come for him, he tells it that he wants it, *desires* it. It dances away and spies on him and taunts him and disappears into wisps of smoke and dreams. Will cries out and screams until his voice is hoarse and the dogs in the other room are barking frantically but nothing changes, and his body burns just as sharply.

His addled brain sends his hand reaching outward, searching for some connection, a body, a hand, a phone. He needs a strong alpha, he needs to be claimed and used and filled. His throat works as his mind tries to produce speech from his roughened vocal cords. He groans out his frustration in a stream of incomprehensible noise.

Will's heat passes in waves, the periods of lucidity making him conscious of his empty need. He feels sick and disgusted at his aching body, at his wet open hole. His traitorous biology making him hope for something that will not come.

As a fresh wave of lust passes through him, burning his skin and setting every nerve ending sparking, Will closes his eyes. He touches himself, pinching nipples and scratching skin as a faceless alpha enters his mind. He slides the still wet and dirty dildo inside himself, bites his lip as one hand starts inflating the bulb. He gets it snug inside himself as the alpha mounts him, knots him, takes him. Will's breath catches as he sees the alpha's face but he doesn't stop, he can't stop. He works at himself, pushing the dildo deeper, pumping the false knot as full as it will go, trying to simulate a tie without getting close to how he imagines the real thing might feel.

He tells his alpha that he's glad he's here, that if he has to choose someone, that it would be him, but the fantasy fades to the reality of his house and his bed and his own hands and the fake cock that doesn't feel how he imagines a real one *must*.

He can't come, can't find relief in the harsh treatment his own hands give his body. The torture lasts on and on, each wave a fresh agony. In his fantasies, Hannibal visits him over and over, mounting and taking but it's never enough, not like the real thing at all and just a teasing taste of what he really wants.

In rare moments of lucidity he sees things thrown into sharp relief, every passing comment from others that burned him, every glance and moment that the world has told him he's less than. It stabs at him and it seems so much clearer now than it ever has before. He sees every decision subverted, every choice invalidated. He can't even trust himself, dreaming of an

alpha just because he treated him with some measure of respect. Will wants to cry out and weep for his existence, for how pathetic he is and for the unfair desire that his hormones pump through his body. He passes from despair to anger in waves as each roll of fire passes through him.

Rage simmers in his gut and it all makes Will despise himself more than any alpha probably ever has. He loathes himself and his stupid body, his biology out of his control. He hates himself more with each moment, even as the heat dissipates before rolling into the next wave. He hates Hannibal, the vision of him that comes to visit and tease him. He hates that his body is so intent on making him weak, of creating him in the shadow of an alpha. He hates so intensely that it makes him feel as though he might vomit up his rage.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Who is an awesome beta? GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead is an awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will isn't paying attention as he leaves the building after class, looking at something in his bag as he makes his way to his car. Hannibal watches him, irritated that he's been forced to chase his prey. But Will has been evasive and Alana has no useful insight to offer. It is Will who needs to reveal himself.

Hannibal steps out of his vehicle and waits for Will to notice him. Will is almost on top of Hannibal, standing right beside Will's station wagon when he finally spots him. His footsteps slow.

Will frowns, shakes his head and moves straight to the door of his car, fishing his keys out and resolutely avoiding Hannibal's presence.

"Will please, I apologise for whatever it is I've done to make you avoid me these past two weeks," Hannibal says, moving to stand behind Will. He chooses his words carefully, best to manipulate Will's sense of guilt.

Will sighs, hunching his shoulders and dropping his hands to his sides. "You haven't *done* anything," Will says between gritted teeth. His voice sounds angry but when he turns around to face Hannibal, he just looks sad and worried. He doesn't look in Hannibal's eye.

"Will, what's wrong?" asks Hannibal, frowning at the look of exhaustion and sadness on Will's face.

Will purses his lips, staring at Hannibal's tie rather than his face. "I...I don't know if I want to talk about this," he says softly and the breeze almost carries it away.

"So don't talk, come, sit with me a minute," Hannibal offers. Will frowns and shakes his head.

"No, I should go home, really Hannibal, I...I'm sorry but I, I don't know if we should see each other, if you should treat me."

"Sit, talk to me," says Hannibal gently and he reaches his hand out, taking Will's arm. Will doesn't resist and he allows Hannibal to pull him away from the door of his station wagon and around to where Hannibal's car is parked. He opens the passenger door and sits Will inside before moving around to the driver's side.

The silence in the car feels wrong and for a moment Hannibal considers playing some music. Instead he breaks the silence with words. “Does this have anything to do with your heat?”

Will’s head snaps up and he looks at Hannibal with big round bloodshot eyes. He ducks his head down and tucks his hands between his thighs, staring at his knees. “I *really* don’t want to talk about this Hannibal.” Will mutters against his own chest. “Ugh, Alana told you, didn’t she?”

Hannibal doesn’t answer the question. He doesn’t want to order Will, doesn’t want to use the simple fate of his being born an alpha against him. This game was always meant to be played with Will believing them to be equals. Removing Will’s choice today is a last resort, and really, it’s Hannibal who was out of options. Hannibal’s patience is finite and after believing Will’s progress to be going so perfectly, for Will to go through his heat without calling out for Hannibal to come to him is enough to push him over the edge. He doesn’t address his own expectation that Will *would* call for him.

”Look at me,” he orders, pushing just enough via scent to tip the struggle in Will’s head. Will turns and looks Hannibal in the eye.

”Is that how it’s going to be?” asks Will.

”I don’t want it to,” says Hannibal, and it’s as truthful as anything he’s ever said. “I only push because I care about you Will.” That part is far less true.

Will huffs out a breath and opens his mouth to speak but it takes him a few seconds to decide the words. “I just had a bad heat, not been feeling well.” Hannibal can tell that Will believes it to be true, even though it’s not.

”What about this heat was so difficult?” he presses. Will glares at him.

”I’m not giving you fodder for some sick…” Will trails off and snorts a little, a forced type of laughter. “It’s just so stupid, biology, life, everything. It’s never going to stop and...I don’t know, I guess it’s just funny that I got this far without realising that.”

”Realising what Will? I don’t understand,” says Hannibal, his mind piecing together the implications of Will’s words.

Will sighs and looks out of the car, fixing his gaze ahead as if looking at the road, as though they’re travelling somewhere rather than simply sitting. “I keep fighting and waiting for things to get better and they never will. I’m *never* going to be the one deciding my fate.” Hannibal holds himself back, remaining silent so Will might be encouraged to continue speaking. Will yawns, reaching up to cover his mouth. “Ugh, don’t know what’s wrong with me, just tired, I don’t know, bad dreams.” Will shakes his head and rubs one eye, as though it will refresh him and make him suddenly energised. “Class was tough today, just need to go home, get some sleep.”

”Nightmare free, I hope,” says Hannibal softly. Will frowns at the windshield but doesn’t respond.

”So your decision to stop being my patient,” says Hannibal, watching Will closely. “Does this mean you no longer wish to continue our friendship?”

Will bites his lip. “What friendship? I’m just an assignment, I’m sure you’d rather have the option to free up the appointment time for someone who isn’t beyond fixing.” Will closes his eyes and sighs, keeping them closed for a few moments before he opens them again, looking out the window and avoiding Hannibal’s gaze.

”Would you give me the opportunity to refute that or is your mind made up?” Hannibal asks, keeping his face free from the frustration he feels. Will’s unpredictability is engaging and yet it’s what makes him not fit into the plans Hannibal makes for him.

Will snorts a little bit, like he’s trying to laugh but doesn't have the energy for it. His hand goes to the door handle and he slides his legs out of the open door. Just before he shifts his weight onto the ground, he looks over his shoulder at Hannibal. “Let me sleep on it?” he asks.

Hannibal smiles at him. “I’ll call you tomorrow,” he says. “It will be your choice.” Will pauses as though he’ll say something else but he doesn’t.

Will closes the car door after himself and climbs into his car. Hannibal watches him start the engine and pull out of the parking lot, not looking back at Hannibal once. Hannibal watches the station wagon disappear and thinks about how he can twist whatever happened during Will’s heat to his favour.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

> Thanks for your continued interest! I love hearing that people are enjoying this <3 A 2 chapter update today so make sure you catch both. Enjoy! *hides*
>
> A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It's closing in on twenty-four hours since Will saw Hannibal and the worry over the thought of picking up the phone gnaws at him. The desire to see Hannibal is too much for his exhausted mind to explain away.

The nightmares, vivid and haunting, were there once more last night, waking Will up in a state of shaking sweating fear. The lack of sleep makes teaching difficult and he's sure he sees movement out of the corner of his eye far too often. The comments from his students, the sarcastic questions and smart ass responses needle at him extra sharply but he tries to blame it on exhaustion.

He sits in the empty lecture theatre for an indeterminate amount of time after the last of the trainees leave. Will sits in the silence and his tired mind tunes out the world around him. He stares at a random point on the floor and leans against the lectern. How nice it would be to fall asleep, right here. The movement of something to the side startles him and for a moment, Will thinks it's Hannibal, come to accost him face to face and demand he get over his feelings.

There's nothing there though, just more shadows dancing around just out of sight. He shakes his head as though it might clear his thoughts. It just makes his vision swim for a moment and Will feels lightheaded and drunk on exhaustion. Despite the nightmares, he'll simply have to sleep tonight, he thinks. No new monsters since they've started covering old cases in class, just the old creatures to haunt him, he can deal with those.

He packs up his things, moving slowly and delaying the phone call he'll have to make. He doesn't know how to explain things, not without telling Hannibal the truth, that he is a crazy unstable omega that Hannibal should have nothing to do with...that he doesn't trust himself around Hannibal. He doesn't want to say it but it's become clear to him at least, his biology will win out in the end. He doesn't want it to though, he wants to be as stubborn and obstinate as ever, wants to show all those people who pointed and stared and made comments about him that they were wrong. He has a point to prove and he really doesn't want to admit to his biological shortcomings. Will at least partly thinks that it would be shameful, to give in, to be just another weak willed omega, especially since he can *see* the world that much clearer. He

can see things other omegas can't. To follow the prescribed path while knowing that, would be a very poor choice indeed.

Beverly's arrival is just another movement in his periphery that might not be real. Then she speaks and he turns and sees her. He's confused but she smiles at him, holds a folder close to her chest and greets him in a way more polite than she ever had done before.

"Hi Will, how have you been?" she asks and Will wants her to get to the point. He also knows how much Beverly subscribes to the idea of omega manners.

"I'm okay," he says quietly. He turns to his papers and starts packing them away as a show to her that he's in a hurry to leave.

"Jack can't know I'm talking to you about this," she says low, her voice conspiratorial. "They're still reviewing the shooting and he's involved with the board, you know."

Will nods and frowns a little. Crawford and a bunch of other alphas and betas deciding his life for him. He hopes they'll just take Hannibal's report at face value and leave him be.

"We had a case, another bad one and one of the victims that I think...I was hoping you would take a look at the file, off the record." Beverly looks at him, expectantly and Will blinks, taking in her words.

Will looks at the folder that she holds out to him. He doesn't want to look, doesn't want to invite a new monster inside, some new darkness to keep him up at night. He's so tired, exhausted, he doesn't want to hunt monsters any more but he knows he doesn't have a choice, he never did. Beverly thrusts the folder forward again and Will takes it, staring at the manila cover. He runs his thumbs across the surface of it and before he can control himself, he's opening it up.

The first page is the medical report which Will barely skims, flipping to the next page immediately. There aren't many photographs, but those that are there show the body from every angle. He stares at them, looking at the unseeing eyes of yet another victim. He slams it shut, closing his eyes before he sees too far into the picture.

"Organs cut out while the victim was alive," says Beverly cautiously. "The other injuries were post mortem but the kidneys...Will I think...I think it's your copycat."

Will frowns at her. "What copycat?"

Beverly puts on a face that she probably thinks looks reasonable but it just makes Will angry at her. "I know Jack was a bit dismissive over the theory," she says. "He really wanted to tie up the Shrike case, I don't think anyone could blame him – but Jimmy, Brian and I were talking and it makes a lot of sense. Now *this* shows up." She waves the folder for emphasis. "It matches enough to be the same killer as Cassie Boyle, a certain copycat."

"It's a man," says Will, the frustration evident in his voice. "Older and the injuries are different, nothing the same except the organ removal and they're not even the same organs." Will slings his bag over his shoulder and starts towards the door.

”Will,” Beverly calls, hurrying after him. “Look I’m not saying it’s *definitely* the same killer but it’s like you said – a psychopath with no distinct motive, could be the organs are trophies.” Will nods but doesn’t answer. “Look Will, I just wanted your opinion, could they be related? It would be nice to have some closure on Cassie’s murder wouldn’t it?”

“I don’t know, maybe,” he says and he walks, head down. He can feel Beverly’s eyes on him as he walks away.

The body in the picture sits in his mind and he can’t help but imagine how the killer might have felt, cutting out the living victim’s kidneys. The insertion of the various pointed objects into the corpse was far harder to parse. Done post mortem so it wasn’t about the sadism of the act but how the body would *look*. Theatre, like the body in the field, all done for show and spectacle.

Will makes his way home, turning the images over in his mind the entire solitary and silent drive. He greets the dogs and hesitates at the phone. Picking it up is difficult but he closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. He dials the number and listens to it ring.

”Hello?”

”Hello Hannibal,” he says, calm and too tired to feel much any more.

”Will, I’m glad you called,” says Hannibal’s voice. It’s easier for Will to hear it through the phone, disconnected from the actual man.

”I...I was thinking about what you were saying, yesterday I mean,” Will’s words are cut off by a yawn he fails to suppress.

”Still having nightmares Will?” asks Hannibal and Will closes his eyes, wondering for a moment how Hannibal had heard him.

”Tough day at work,” says Will simply, no need to expand on it beyond that. Thankfully Hannibal doesn’t ask, just asks how Will is doing in a general sort of way and Will lets on that he’s fine. He’s not sure if he’s at all convincing.

”I was thinking,” says Hannibal, measured and calm. It should irritate Will, should set him off and bring on all the displaced anger that’s been simmering away all week but it’s oddly comforting, steadying. “If you won’t see me as a patient, would you see me as a friend?”

Will bites his lip and frowns, cradling the phone against his shoulder and reaching down to scratch one of the dogs’ ears as they mill around his legs. “I don’t know Hannibal,” he says softly. He considers how tired he is, how he doesn’t have the energy to put up a fight if Hannibal is determined to make them spend time together.

”A distraction at least,” offers Hannibal, “from work.”

Will nods a little before moving the phone to his other ear. “Yeah, yeah maybe.”

”Wonderful,” says Hannibal brightly, “dinner then, at mine, tomorrow night…that’s if you want to. I don’t mean to pressure you but I’d really like it if you would join me.”

Will isn't sure when he agreed to it, he's not actually sure he has, but the words come out without a conscious decision being made and Hannibal sounds so *pleased*. It makes Will feel a little spark of happiness in his chest.

Hannibal gives him the time and an address and Will writes it down as the dogs snuffle at his feet, searching for food. Once he hangs up he looks at the phone and shakes his head. He doesn't know what he's doing, not any more. The anger that's been brewing in him, the frustration when he thinks about Hannibal is still there, and yet he can't say no to the man. It's a dangerous precedent.

Will yawns and despite the early hour, wonders if he can find some rest now, here, with his dogs and familiar surroundings. He closes his eyes for a moment, willing the frustration down, telling himself to be calm. The image of the body that Beverly showed him floats back into view, something dark standing over it. When Will shakes his head to clear it, he catches a glimpse of something that feels familiar but he can't put his finger on what.

The shadow of the feathered stag stalks him to his bed and to where his head hits the pillow. No new monster joins his nightmares as he feared, but the usual cast is there, the stag taking center stage.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Why Hannibal, what are you up to? ;P

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal smiles when the doorbell rings, smiles even wider when he smells Will through the door. His smile disappears into a frown when he sees Will's face, eyes dull with exhaustion.

Will looks shabby as usual even though he's clearly put extra effort into his appearance. Tiredness can do that to a person, not only sucking the vigor out of them but making them seem grey and lacking in contrast. Hannibal makes a mental note to prescribe Will a sleeping aid. Convincing him to take it will be another task entirely. He pauses for a moment to consider that a sleep deprived Will is more vulnerable, easier to manipulate. He ignores the option, telling himself it would take away the challenge.

Will steps cautiously after Hannibal, clutching his arms to himself and seeming smaller. Hannibal wonders how exactly his lack of sleep is affecting his cognitive abilities, how long until true exhaustion sets in. He considers that it may only be a matter of time before Will's body gives out.

Will is quiet, he sits and watches Hannibal tidy away the implements of cooking, his eyes following Hannibal's practiced movements. He sips at the glass of wine that he's been given but not with any enthusiasm.

"I do hope you'll enjoy dinner," says Hannibal, looking through the oven window. "I thought you'd prefer something a little more...simple."

Will shrugs and looks up from his barely touched wine. "So what is it then Hannibal?"

"Steak and kidney pie," says Hannibal with a smile. "Though not quite traditional, I must admit, I enjoyed putting a new spin on it." He winks at Will, who looks away.

Hannibal ushers Will into the dining room, seating him at one of the place settings. Will looks lost in the big room and he sits with his hands on his lap, looking at the wineglass in front of him. He reaches out to it for a drink as Hannibal leaves the room.

Will's glass is empty when Hannibal returns, holding steaming plates of his beautifully crafted individual pies. Even the garnish is a work of art. He places Will's plate first, then his own before he fetches the wine and pours them both another glass.

Will leans forward, sniffs at the food and his eyes slide shut as he savours the aroma. He swallows before his eyes open and a faint smile passes his lips. He pauses for a moment and looks up at Hannibal. Hannibal looks down at his plate and picks up his silverware, noting how Will mirrors his movements, cutting into his own pie and tasting it, relishing it. Hannibal allows himself to look up and watch Will's face as he chews, eyes sliding shut again and a smile creasing the edges of his mouth as he swallows.

"This is so good, you're a really good cook," says Will sincerely. He takes another bite. Hannibal enjoys watching him chew and swallow it, the pleasure the food brings him clear on his face. It seems a good meal has granted Will a small spark of renewed vigor and he eats with enthusiasm, though Hannibal can tell he's holding himself back a bit, for the sake of manners.

They eat in relative silence, Will's comfort apparently growing as he rests his elbows on the table as he reaches for his glass. He still seems tired, his face pinched and eyes dark underneath but he smiles more and it make Hannibal happy.

"Seems a home cooked meal has done you good," Hannibal comments, holding his glass up to Will briefly before he drinks from it.

"I cook at home," says Will, a little defensively. "Just nothing this *good*."

"I enjoy cooking, particularly for others. Your apparent appreciation makes it more worthwhile."

Will nods and looks at his empty plate. "I did enjoy it, thank you," he says quietly, looking down and Hannibal sighs internally at the step back in Will's behaviour tonight.

"I cook as a hobby, it relaxes me," says Hannibal. Will looks up and Hannibal smiles.

"Relaxation...that's nice, I guess." Will leans his chin on one hand and looks at Hannibal. He tilts his head a little to one side as if contemplating something.

"We all need to destress Will," offers Hannibal. Will blinks a few times.

"And for you that's when you cook?" asks Will, after a brief pause. He looks curiously at Hannibal. It feels good to have his undivided attention and Hannibal smiles back at him.

"Not just cooking, I enjoy music, reading...I like to meet with others, to talk with interesting people is a great pleasure. I attend events – the opera is a favourite of mine." Hannibal watches Will closely as he speaks, enjoying how Will studies him, looking at his face intently. Will seems to brighten with each word, waking him up from the hazy state he arrived in. "And how about you Will? What do you do to…*destress*?"

Will bites his lip, straightening in his chair. "I fish."

"Been fishing lately?" Hannibal asks. Will shakes his head. No. "And why is that?"

Will shrugs and looks down. "I don't know," he says quietly.

”Do you enjoy fishing Will?” Hannibal asks.

”Yes.”

”So, take me fishing,” says Hannibal with a smile. Will looks up at him, his face betraying his suspicion. “I think I’d like it,” says Hannibal. “You can teach me to fish, and I can cook our catch.” Will tries to suppress a smile but Hannibal catches it, tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Will looks down at his plate, sliding his finger along the edge of his place setting, back and forth. Hannibal watches him think. “Do I get a choice in the matter then?” Hannibal isn’t sure if he’s joking or not. It’s not beyond the realms of possibility that it’s Will’s attempt at a joke, but it could also be a test. Hannibal knows how preciously Will guards his self determination.

”I’m sorry Will, I didn’t mean to push you, it’s only if you’d allow me to accompany you. It’s up to you.”

”Sorry,” says Will so softly it’s barely a whisper. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

”So perhaps instead I shall ask,” offers Hannibal. Will watches him, face guarded. “Will, would you consider teaching me to fish?”

Will nods. “Sure,” he says.

”And perhaps,” adds Hannibal, “since we are extending invitations, you would like to accompany me to the opera. If you teach me to fish, it’s only fair I teach you something in return, and a live opera performance is something one should experience.”

Will looks up at him before his gaze skitters away again to the side. He gnaws on his lip a moment before he shakes his head and Hannibal sees the slight colour in his cheeks. He looks down, hand going for his wineglass and swallowing down the last mouthful.

”I don’t think the opera is my thing,” says Will quietly, looking into his empty glass.

”Have you ever been?” Hannibal asks, leaning his chin onto the backs of his hands. Will doesn't respond. “At least you can say you tried something new.” Will looks at him, tilting his head a fraction to one side. He bites his lip and Hannibal knows he’s close to acquiescing. “There’s a performance of some of my favourite arias next Friday, come with me. I’ll pick you up at eight.”

Will laughs, despite himself. He shakes his head. “You won’t stop until I agree to come? I’ll stick out like a sore thumb.”

”I’ll send something over for you to wear,” Hannibal offers. Will frowns.

”You’re buying me clothes now?” he asks suspiciously. “This is sounding less like an optional event Hannibal.”

Aware of how tenuous this game has suddenly become, Hannibal treads lightly. Will only makes the choices Hannibal wants when he *thinks* they are his choices to make. “I’m sorry, I

don’t mean to push, I just enjoy your company Will. I don’t mean to make you uncomfortable. I would rent a suit for you, and if you prefer you could pay me back. I understand if you don’t want to come.” Will looks at his face, eyes narrowed. “And don’t worry Will, it is only your attire for that evening that I believe I am renting.”

Will’s gaze shifts to the side again as he weighs it up. He bites his lip and Hannibal forces himself not to stare at the flesh caught between Will’s teeth. Finally after so long a gap that Hannibal has already had no option but to release his held breath and start to *breathe*, Will has made his choice. “Okay,” he says quietly.

Hannibal pats his lips with his napkin. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

This is *not* a date ;P

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will tugs at his shirt collar and wonders when he allowed himself to relax in Hannibal's company. He wonders how he allowed himself to agree to come with Hannibal tonight. He knows he chose to come, should be glad of the decision but it seems no matter what he decides to do he always ends up regretting it.

To the outside eye this evening might even look as though Hannibal is *courting* him. The idea alone should make Will laugh at its absurdity, but he woke this morning still exhausted and he can't seem to find the energy to care. He yawns and leans back in the seat of the car, watches the buildings fly by and thinks how pathetic it is that a little tiredness can make him so weak and easily swayed. He has to keep reminding himself that Hannibal didn't force him to come tonight.

Will shifts slightly in his seat, uncomfortable in the unfamiliar clothes. He feels foolish, knowing that his borrowed suit doesn't fit him well and he doesn't carry it with anywhere near the confidence of Hannibal.

Will is taken aback when they arrive at the museum, the whole thing seeming both smaller than he'd imagined but grander than he'd pictured too. Couples in evening wear, who appear to be mainly alpha and omega pairings, make their way up the steps and into the building.

Will peers out the window, not even realising that Hannibal has stepped out to hand his keys off to the valet until his door is being opened. Will looks down and feels stupid, refusing Hannibal's offered hand and stepping out of the car. He's not some fragile flower of an omega who needs help standing up. He clenches the muscles in jaw to prevent himself from saying something that will be more trouble than it's worth.

Will resolutely holds his arms to his sides as they make their way up the steps. In front and behind, couples hold arms, neatly paired up. Will narrows his eyes at the thought that to the outside party, they very much *are* on a date. So much for teaching him to enjoy the opera.

By the time that they enter the building, Will has decided that just because everyone else might perceive this as some kind of date, it doesn't mean it has to be one. He's still not sure what Hannibal thinks of this though, what his plan for the evening is. He's not even sure if

Hannibal *likes* him or if it's simply a case of overly thorough therapy. He has to remind himself that he's not actually a particularly desirable omega and that Hannibal has been quite reserved the entire time he's known him.

People mill around in the lobby and talk and laugh but Hannibal walks straight through to where chairs have been set up before a small low stage. There are banners and fabric draped around, it's well lit and Will has to admit, beautiful in the overly extravagant way he knows he doesn't fit into. Will feels foolish as he trots after Hannibal, like a small child forced to run to keep up, or an unwanted omega running after their oblivious alpha.

As Hannibal points out a seat and Will sits in it, he considers that he really is too tired to care. In a literal sense, the urge to fight and argue and kick up a stink has been taken out of him by exhaustion. He wonders if Alana would be pleased and then he yawns. Hannibal blows air out his nose in a show of mirth.

"It hasn't even started yet," he says in a low voice as he flips through the programme.

Will shakes his head. "Not bored, just a little tired," he replies, glancing sideways at Hannibal before looking at the backs of the heads of those already seated.

"Your sleep has not been restful? Still?" asks Hannibal and Will would roll his eyes at him if he could bring himself to care to.

"I sleep, it's just never *enough* sleep, lately at least," Will says softly. He clutches his hands in his lap and taps his feet in the uncomfortable dress shoes he's had for a long time but rarely has a reason to wear.

Thankfully Hannibal drops the subject and turns his attention back to the programme. Will feels awkward and foolish. He looks around and sees the interested faces of other attendees. While it may simply be because the opera scene in Baltimore doesn't have that many new faces, he can't help but fall back on the disgusted thought that people just can't keep their eyes to themselves when there are omegas around, especially with the scent of unmated ones.

Will manages to restrain his fidgeting as more people take their seats and the performance gets underway. Thankfully an omega sits to his left and he ignores Will, paying more attention to his alpha companion and the singer who takes the stage. Will leans a little towards Hannibal anyway, the only point of familiarity in strange surroundings.

The music is nice, Will supposes, though it's difficult for him to appreciate it the way Hannibal does. Will can't help but shift his focus to the man beside him, watching how his eyes slide shut. Will looks forward quickly when Hannibal's eyes open and Will tells himself that he couldn't have spotted tears in Hannibal's eyes.

The performance is overly long for Will's tastes, the novelty of it wearing off quickly. He sits and his eyes wander. As yet another piece of music comes to an end, Will is startled by the clapping and Hannibal's swift movement to stand. A moment later and the rest of the audience are on their feet, applauding and Will realises that it's over. He tells himself that now that he's experienced it, he won't have to come here again, and he stands to join in.

”You didn’t enjoy it,” says Hannibal quietly, inclining his head a fraction. Will looks up at him then forward again, shaking his head slightly.

”It wasn’t *bad*,” he responds. “Just too many people.”

For a moment Will expects Hannibal to touch him, to pat him on the shoulder or give some kind of physical encouragement. Thankfully he doesn’t. Hannibal smiles and steps towards the open lobby area before looking back over his shoulder. Will follows.

Hannibal is confident and social in a way Will could only dream about. Everyone hangs on his every word and laughs at his wit. All of them glance at him, clearing wanting to ask about Hannibal’s companion but too polite to do it.

Hannibal is in conversation with an elegant older alpha in a red dress as Will stands by his elbow and glances across the crowd. Will feels their eyes on him as his eyes skip across their faces and onto the next. The chubby bearded man doesn’t look away when Will looks back, he stares at Will with a look that seems as though he’s just tasted something he didn’t like at all and isn’t shy about saying it. Will frowns.

”This is Will Graham,” says Hannibal and Will realises that the woman has enquired about him. Hannibal has been nice enough to leave Will to his own devices, perceptive enough to see how little Will is enjoying the roomful of people. Will smiles at the woman politely but doesn’t look her in the eye. She’s still an alpha.

”I was just asking if you’ve seen him cook,” she says with a smile. “It’s an entire performance!”

”This is Ms Komeda,” says Hannibal. He turns to her. “I’ve cooked for him but he has yet to see the…*performance*, as you put it.”

She laughs and pats his arm. “Oh Hannibal, I never thought I’d see the day!” Something about her tone annoys Will. She looks over their shoulders, distracted and Will turns to see what’s happening. The bearded man who stared at him earlier is there, dragging a man along with him and looking up at Hannibal. Now Will gets a proper whiff of the beta. He wrinkles his nose a little.

The beta’s eyes leave Hannibal for a fraction of a second, going to Will then back to Hannibal’s face. “Hi, it’s nice to see you!” He indicates his companion. “This is Tobias.” Tobias is an alpha and Will feels the annoyance in his gut bubbling away when he looks Will up and down. It makes Will feel cheap and dirty. For a moment Will wonders if they might have the wrong idea of Will and Hannibal, not only that this is a date but that it’s some kind of paid exchange. Will has to remind himself that he hasn’t even shaved his beard off for Hannibal, so he hardly looks the picture perfect omega and he *chose* to come tonight.

Hannibal isn’t happy, Will can tell, despite Hannibal’s perfect manners. The beta, Franklyn, acts oblivious, projecting what he hopes to see back on Hannibal’s face. It’s clear enough to Will what’s going on, especially when Franklyn makes that face of disgust again when asking who Will is.

Hannibal touches him for the first time this evening, cups his elbow and draws his arm closer. “This is Will,” he says and he gazes down at Will with a look of pure adoration. It sends a rush of soft warmth through Will, his heart sailing inside his chest and sets everything in him to a dizzying spin. It’s not real of course, it’s clearly just Hannibal having a bit of fun with the insufferable Franklyn but Will can’t help how his heart reacts.

Will shakes his head and smiles at Franklyn fakely, and behind it he wonders what is going wrong in his head. Will isn’t sure when he became this person, why he’s okay being an omega on an alpha’s arm, even if it *is* all just for show.

At some point in the evening Will realises he doesn’t mind Hannibal holding his arm, that it’s comforting in a way, to have the other alphas stay back, to know that they won’t bother to approach. He smiles and zones out a little, barely listening to Hannibal’s various conversations, and he dozes peacefully in the car on the way home. Hannibal is a perfect gentleman at Will’s door as they say goodnight, and Will’s sleep that night is deep but still not enough for what his body needs.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

This is one of my personal favourite bits, I hope you like it too!

A big thank you to GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal does not appreciate being woken at a late hour. He might have even left the phone to ring itself out if there wasn't the possibility of an emergency. None of his patients have his home telephone number. There is one not-quite patient who does though, and the last thing Hannibal expects is a call about 'his omega' on the other end, the police officer sounding irritated and telling him that Will is okay but to come to the station. Hannibal can't be annoyed at being woken, not when a troubled Will thought of him first of all, not with the knowledge that he chose Hannibal. It's enough to keep him smiling the entire way to the police station.

Will has been exhausted for some time now, that has been clear. It's made Will pliable, less quick to anger and more easily manipulated. The challenge has gone out of it a bit perhaps, but it brings Hannibal enjoyment in a new way.

It's dark but the lights shine in the entrance to the station and he sees the officers on night duty standing around when they should no doubt be working, one of them playing with a medium sized brown dog. Hannibal frowns at the dog, jumping around indoors. The smell of dog reminds him of certain parts of Will's scent undertones though, so it's not all bad.

The officer at the desk looks up from the magazine he's flicking through. He looks bored and tired and in no mood for Hannibal. Hannibal is in no mood for him so he keeps calm and smiles apologetically at the man to get a speedy response from him. "I'm here about the omega," he begins, only for the officer to cut him off.

"Oh man, he's *yours*? Might wanna keep a tighter leash on him, if ya know what I mean." He grins at Hannibal and looks at the other officers over Hannibal's shoulder, grinning even wider at them. Hannibal's eyes take in the man's badge number before shifting back to the man's face.

"Yes, yes, of course, very funny," Hannibal does his best to make his voice sound of boredom rather than of the frustration that brews inside. "I don't believe he's done anything wrong though? Has he?"

The officer straightens up and stands up from his stool, looking annoyed; opening and closing his mouth several times. One of the officers behind Hannibal pipes up. “Oh come on, bit suspicious isn’t it? Unmated omega wandering around late at night in his underwear? Gotta check these things out.” The officer at the desk nods enthusiastically and points.

Hannibal sighs, closing his eyes for a moment to calm himself. He turns and smiles at the group of officers. “Really thank you for taking care of him but it’s time to bring him home,” Hannibal says, spreading his hands to address them all. The don’t look very impressed but one of them splits from the group and says he’ll go fetch his omega.

His omega. Something about it, despite the tone, sounds appealing to Hannibal. He waits and the officer scratching the dog’s ears says “Hey!” as the dog scampers forward. The dog rushes to meet Will, trailing behind the officer who returns, twirling keys on one finger. He points at Will with a thumb over his shoulder and returns to his seat.

Will pets the dog and looks up at Hannibal. He looks worn out, grey and washed out in his equally grey t shirt and boxer shorts. “Thanks for coming,” he says softly and he looks up at Hannibal but doesn’t hold his gaze. They walk out to Hannibal’s car and Hannibal hears the officers laughing behind them.

”Make sure you knot him good, don’t want him wandering off again!” one of them calls lewdly. Hannibal files his mental picture of their faces away for later.

Hannibal frowns when Will lets the dog into the backseat of his car before getting himself settled in the passenger seat. He hopes the dog is at least trained decently enough to not to mess his car and he considers how he’ll remove the smell from the seats. At least leather cleans well, he has plenty of experience wiping various surfaces down.

They drive in silence at first, Hannibal doesn’t press and Will doesn’t offer. Instead he stares out the window, yawning occasionally before stretching his eyes wide and occasionally shaking his head.

”Thanks for coming, didn’t know who else to call,” says Will suddenly, voice low and sounding flatter than the words probably should, considering Will’s night. “I mean, I could have called...I just thought you’d maybe understand.” Hannibal doesn’t take his eyes off the road. He hears Will sigh.

They drive in silence for a little longer, the wheels of the car moving over the deserted nighttime roads and Wil stares out of the window pensively. Hannibal glances sideways at him when he’s sure Will isn’t looking his way.

”They put me in a *cell*,” says Will, suddenly voicing the thoughts that must have been on his mind. “I don’t even remember how I got out there...but they treated me like a *criminal*.”

”You don’t remember how you got where?” Hannibal asks. “You called and I came Will, I’d like to know the full story.” He glances over and sees Will watching him.

”I’m sorry,” Will says quietly. “I think I was sleepwalking, I guess I must have been, just wandering. I was so *cold*.” He wraps his arms around himself and Hannibal leans forward to

turn the heat up a little more. “They found me wandering in the road a couple miles from my house...I must have been walking for hours. Winston followed me I guess.” Hannibal looks at the dog in his rearview mirror. So the beast has a name.

”Have you been sleepwalking much Will?” Hannibal asks.

Will grunts before he says “How could I tell? For all I know I do it all the time, I just don’t usually go out in the cold.”

They drive on in silence for a little longer and Will sighs softly. “Sorry, just tired...lost time.” He rubs at his face and looks out the window. “Where are we going?”

”To my house,” Hannibal answers. He expects Will to argue, to fight him on it, even though asking Hannibal to drive for another hour and a half at this time of night is a terrible idea and Will knows it. Will doesn’t argue, he stays quiet and Hannibal reaches out to put on a CD. He turns the volume down low and the classical music softens up the silence.

”I suppose you think all this is okay,” says Will as he looks out at the road in front. Hannibal glances over at him. Will stares blankly ahead, speaking his thoughts without really considering the words. “Poor stupid little omegas and the only way they’ll let you live is to change who you are.”

”You don’t have to change who you are Will,” says Hannibal, his own voice surprising him. He pauses, collecting the words before he blurts something more out. He’s more measured when he continues. “Who you are is perfectly fine, you just need to see a better way to fit into the space the world has made for you.”

Will grunts in acknowledgement but Hannibal isn’t sure he really heard. Will’s eyes are glassy and he doesn’t seem to be all there. He stares out the window as they drive onwards.

They reach familiar streets and soon Hannibal is pulling in to the space in front of his house. Will trails after Hannibal to the door, his movements sluggish.

Hannibal considers insisting the dog stay outside, but the night air is chilly and the dog is pressed against Will’s leg. Hannibal lets them both inside.

Will yawns and looks up at Hannibal with dull eyes; for a moment Hannibal thinks of all the ways it would be so easy to take advantage right now. His nostrils flare as he takes in Will’s scent but as delightful as it is, there are too many unpleasant odours layered over it. He leads Will to the guest bedroom. Winston follows them, nosing around everything and Hannibal frowns at the dog but doesn’t say anything.

Will sits on the bed, knees over the edge and his feet just above the carpet. He looks up at Hannibal with half closed lids. He looks like he’ll drop at any moment, like he already is asleep but his body just hasn’t gotten the news yet. He looks as though he wouldn’t put up a fight whatever Hannibal did. Hannibal smiles at him, the barest upturn of his lips.

”It’s all so stupid, needing an alpha to get me out of jail when I haven’t even *done* anything wrong.” Will says before another yawn splits his face. The dog rests it’s head on the bed next

to Will's thigh and he absently strokes it. "That's my life huh? Forever needing an alpha to save me."

"Living life as you do requires certain...sacrifices," says Hannibal, cautiously. Will shakes his head and looks at the pillow on the bed.

"Just seems like having an alpha gets you certain special treatment from where I'm standing," Will says. Then he yawns again. He turns to look at Hannibal but he doesn't seem to be looking at him, more through him, as though he's already asleep and dreaming. "Life would be easier, wouldn't it?" he asks. His voice goes soft, like he's barely putting effort into creating the sound. "Is that how you make your space? You have to get someone else to make it bigger for you first so you can fit." Will flops back on the bed without a pause. Hannibal smiles at the motion and he moves to stand closer, seeing Will's closed eyes. "...mmm never been y'know," he slurs sleepily. "Always wondered, but don't wanna….find out who...guess you'd be different…." His sleepy mumbles turn into even breaths. His legs hang off the side of the bed but Hannibal leaves him be.

Winston watches as Hannibal leans a little closer, closes his eyes and draws Will's scent into his nostrils, truly appreciating him.

There's dirt and sweat and *dog* but there, right there, under it all is a sweetness that isn't quite Will. It's the sweetness of infection and Hannibal opens his eyes. He looks down at Will, fast asleep, and wonders how much of his problems of late are some mystery illness, and how much is simple nightmares.

He closes the door as quietly as possible, not bothering to shoo the dog off the bed as he leaves.

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your awesome comments and kudos <3

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will wakes to afternoon sun, a deserted house and a note from Hannibal. The note sits on top of a small bundle of clothes by the door. Will pulls on the too-big sweater, the soft cotton pants and the thick wool socks. Will suspects the pants are simply fancy pajamas. He doubts Hannibal owns sweats, though he also imagines the alpha working out too, muscles tense and sweaty. Will cuts the train of thought off abruptly.

The clothes are baggy on him and Will feels like a child playing dress-up. He frowns at the drag of the pants against the polished wooden floors. Is Hannibal really this much taller? This much broader? He shakes his head and tells himself to stop thinking about the dimensions of Hannibal's body.

Hannibal's note invites him to use his shower and eat the breakfast left for him in the kitchen. Will doesn't want to strip off in Hannibal's house, even a locked bathroom. As much as his body aches and as much as a hot shower might feel good, Will dresses quickly despite his no doubt awful smell and his uncomfortable skin. Will heads straight downstairs, Winston trailing after him.

Will intends to call a taxi right away and get home, leave the note and the breakfast right there, waiting for Hannibal to come home from wherever he is. Will can't bring himself to leave the food though and he devours it. He lets Winston have a small bite of sausage but he's too hungry to be generous enough to share.

Once done eating, Will sits at Hannibal's table in Hannibal's kitchen and rubs his eyes. He wonders what's going on, when his world got so crazy, when *he* got so crazy. Even *more* crazy, he corrects. Off cases now and he still can't hold it together. Winston rests his head on Will's thigh and Will absentmindedly scratches his ears before reaching for Hannibal's phone.

Will calls several taxi agencies and car services until he finds someone willing to drive him home with a dog and money on arrival. He's certain he must have racked up quite a phone bill for Hannibal but he doesn't care. It's difficult to care about much anymore, not when he's still so sleepy. He blames it on his strange night and a strange bed.

Will wanders through Hannibal's empty house while he waits. Winston follows him from room to room and Will pauses in each, looking at the artworks and antiques everywhere. He shakes his head. Hannibal is a type of person Will didn't think existed any more. He's seen the dining room before and he pauses in the doorway of it and frowns at the memory of sharing a meal here.

Now that he's awake – as in between wakefulness and exhaustion as his state is – he wonders about last night. He only has flashes of things, broken-up images of fleeting moments. He remembers feeling lost and hurt and overwhelmingly *angry* at the officers. He remembers the anger and the thoughts of how good it might feel to pull a trigger and wipe the leering grins off the alpha officer who was too forward. He remembers feeling safe in Hannibal's car, everything but Hannibal forgotten as he'd calmed down, but not much after that. For a moment he wonders if Hannibal carried him inside from the car and his stomach twists in embarrassment at the thought.

Hannibal had been a perfect gentleman, Will is sure of that much; Hannibal wouldn't do anything like that. Will has heard it all, read plenty of stories of abuses and omegas who weren't believed when they told their tales and Will is sad that he feels relieved that it didn't happen to him too. He's sad he has to feel relief, because it should be the natural state of affairs.

He's lost in the big empty house that smells like Hannibal. He spends most of his wait stroking Winston's head and feeling stupid. He feels like he deserves praise for getting out of here under his own steam, for arranging his own ride home and avoiding owing Hannibal more favours. He feels stupid even as he thinks these thoughts, another stupid omega who doesn't even know what they want and needs and alpha to tell them. He shakes his head hard but the thoughts don't stay back for long.

The driver is a beta who grins at Will when he answers the door. Will can imagine his lewd thoughts and assumptions but he's too tired, too sick of caring to mind anymore. He bangs the front door of Hannibal's house shut and wishes he had shoes as he pads out to the car in Hannibal's socks.

Will's happy enough that the driver keeps his interaction to a minimum. He looks at Will occasionally in the rearview mirror and occasionally asks for clearer directions. Will knows what the man is probably thinking. There was a time, only recently, when he'd feel angry and frustrated and want to scream and hate everyone for just *assuming* that he is what they only think they see. Instead Will looks out the window and watches the world go by as they close the gap between him and home, with the isolation and safety that brings with it.

The driver makes a show of counting the money after Will goes into his house to retrieve the cash from his emergency stash. He counts the money slowly and Will hops from foot to foot on the cold ground and is massively relieved when he's finally satisfied enough to leave.

The dogs mill around him, the others not bothering to follow when Will wandered off last night. Will feeds them and then watches them eat enthusiastically.

Will sits on the couch and pulls his legs up to his chest. He tugs the sleeves of the sweater down over his hands and rubs at the fabric between his thumb and finger. Perhaps he should

take it off, exchange these borrowed clothes for his own. He doesn't though, he sits statue-still and thinks. He should feel uneasy, should be wary of his growing comfort spending time with Hannibal. He yawns and leans against the arm of the sofa and bites his lip. Is it so bad to have someone new to call a friend? It was nice after all, when the officers laughed and mocked him, that he actually had the number of someone who might come and collect him. Will is sure he remembers a silly joke about how a friend helps you move, but a true friend helps you move a dead body. Perhaps he could add 'driving in the night to pick up your pathetic sleepwalking omega friend from the police station' to that definition.

Will hunches in his seat and closes his eyes, the pounding pain in his head burning at the back of his skull. He slept late but it's not enough, it never seems to be lately. He yawns again.

If he were in his right mind, if he were properly alert and feeling *right*, maybe then he'd have a proper response to this thing with Hannibal. Their friendship is strange, unlike anything Will has experience with. He feels like he should be uncomfortable, should think Hannibal's presence in his life is *making* him uncomfortable, but it's not. If anything is making Will uncomfortable, it's precisely his own *comfort* with the situation. He sits on the couch and stares and his brain fizzles out on him and he can't even think properly any more.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

What a busy day and I almost forgot to update! Sorry about that, here's today's chapter!

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

If Hannibal were his own patient, he'd probably push himself into action. He'd enjoy watching himself forced to chase after Will and set all sorts of things into motion. He is glad Bedelia is his therapist instead, her words measured and even and her approach calm and thoughtful. Bedelia prefers thought to action, reflection to reaction.

She is not pleased to see him. She disguises it but Hannibal knows. He does not care.

"Your omega again?" she asks. He doesn't need to confirm it, they both know why he's here. Even he needs to talk about these things sometimes.

They sit and study one another and Hannibal weighs up what to tell her, what to say to get her best perspective on it. She speaks first, thankfully enough.

"You are courting him then," she says. She smiles faintly.

"That would depend on the definition...but yes, on some level perhaps I am." Once spoken, the words are there, making his game change by their very tangibility. He can't deny the affections he's found within himself. "I've decided to pursue him," he adds. It sounds better when put that way.

Her smile grows a bit and she crosses her legs and she looks at him in a way that he doesn't like. "So what has changed your mind then?" she asks.

"I am not so arrogant as to believe I cannot change my mind. That's a fault that Will suffers from." He narrows his eyes at her and her smile shifts from her face back to a mask of neutrality.

"So you're not so caught up as to believe him perfect?" she asks. He purses his lips.

"Must I? Perhaps it is his imperfection that make him interesting to me." The smile comes back across her lips for a moment before her face is once more blank. Hannibal narrows his eyes and stares at her until she looks away.

”You think you were right then,” Hannibal says. She doesn’t respond so he continues. “You think I’m falling for him, because he’s an omega and I’m an alpha.” She looks at him, her face calm and serene. She blinks at him for a moment, looking back into his eyes.

”Did I say that? Did I say you were falling because he’s an omega and you’re an alpha?” she asks. He frowns.

”You said that we all fall to our biology, in the end.”

She smiles. ”That we do Hannibal. There’s no choice in that. You’ve been around plenty of omegas, this one must be *special*.”

Hannibal narrows his eyes at her. “You enjoy it, the idea that it might be out of my control, that my biology could get the better of me.”

”You enjoy your games Hannibal, and you always win at them. In this situation, where the control you value so highly is out of your hands, what’s not to enjoy?”

He does not like her words but it does not remove their truth. She enjoys this moment, as well she might, this is not a common occurrence. He considers what she says and wonders what his next step in his game with Will can be. Is mating Will an inevitability? Does he have a choice in the matter? He does not like the idea of losing control.

”I suppose you shall finally understand how the rest of us live our lives Hannibal,” Bedelia says as she shifts in her seat. She looks out of the window.

”What do you mean by that?” he asks, even as he has suspicions of his own.

”You’ve always been so confident in your belief that you control your destiny Hannibal,” she says, continuing to look outside. “Like a child who believed every word they were told about what they could be when they grew up. As though you see everyone else as they truly are, a collection of behaviours and instinct and patterns and you’re the only one who is different, the only one who sees the strings.” She turns back to look at him. “The choices you make are just as much of an illusion as the choices you present to this omega. You’re just another player in your own game Hannibal.”

”How long have you been waiting for the opportunity to say this?” he asks.

”Long enough,” she replies with a smile.

He mulls over her words for a while, rejecting some and embracing others. He does not truly believe that he is simply another player in a game. He *knows* he holds more control over things than she sees. She does not know all of him, and what she does know of him only constitutes one part of his public face. What is clear though, whether it is by choice or not, is that he has found himself pursuing Will.

It is more than a game and the desire to manipulate, he genuinely *wants* Will. He wonders what Will’s heat will smell like, when it’s full and present and he’s begging for Hannibal. He wonders how it might feel to mount Will and claim him for his own.

Will's current altered state could work to his advantage, it would make things so much easier. He could make Will come to him, so he can claim his next heat when it arrives, can knot Will and bond the omega to him. The image is appealing and yet there's something wrong with it.

Hannibal does not enjoy the rest of his visit with Bedelia; he does not like her knowing looks and the the way she talks of Will. Hearing her say his name, referring to him as *his omega* feels like a joke, as though she's rubbing it in. Will isn't Hannibal's, and isn't that the problem?

He had laid awake last night, with Will in the next room and thoughts of creeping in and watching him sleep coming to him unbidden. He didn't though, hadn't wanted to, hadn't wanted to even more than the part of him that really *did* want to. He has not felt this at war within himself for a long time, not since he accepted his desire to kill.

As he leaves Bedelia's and makes his way home he weighs up his thoughts, and settles to his most comforting and reliable option. He shall do what he *wants*. Right now he wants to have Will, to possess him in the way an alpha possesses an omega, the way people have interacted for centuries. It's right and necessary, the way things should be. He believes this to be his freely made choice and there's comfort in that.

His house is empty when he gets home and Will has not even left a note for him.

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the lateness, I was getting another fic prepped to post! (Psst, it's a one shot, check it out here.)
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will had been determined not to see Hannibal, had told himself that he couldn't trust himself not to fall for whatever it was the man was playing. Hannibal just needs to ask and Will agrees, without even sure if he wants whatever is being offered. He knows he can't trust himself.

He overhears things in between classes, the type of casual comments he's heard far too often. He does not wish for some foolish thoughtless comment on the place of omegas in the FBI or how attractive some stupid alpha student finds the various omegas they know to affect him so deeply. The words sink into him and make him angry deep inside, too deep to reach by anything but the darkest parts of himself. He's so tired, too worn out from fighting against the urges he feels and against simply feeling too much. He's felt angry enough for a lifetime without the release he craves..

One moment he's in a deserted lecture hall, moving and wishing to be *home* and the next he's outside Hannibal's office. It frightens him, like a nightmare where he finds himself already caught up running away from some dark presence with no memory of how he got there. He looks at his watch and even when he squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head before looking back, the time stays the same. This is not a dream.

The lost time should scare him, it does, but what scares him more is that he came *here*. He cannot trust himself, he knows that now, his body will go to Hannibal and he doesn't have a choice. He is tired, too tired of not being the one to decide his own fate.

Hannibal is pleased to see him and he sits Will in his office and goes to make a phone call. Will thinks he might be cancelling an appointment to make room for Will being here. It is not all in his head, it cannot be; this is more than a simple professional relationship, more than a desire for a friend. This is all so far out of Will's experience that he's floundering and lost and scared and too tired and worn out to fight against the current.

Hannibal sits with him and watches him and asks him why he left that day, why he didn't wait for Hannibal to return. Will can't even lie, can't explain himself in a way that hides how lost he is. He doesn't know exactly why, just that it had to be done, that he had no choice, he

has no choices any more. He does not decide any of the things that have happened. He did not choose to be born an omega, did not decide to enter that first heat and have his whole world fall apart from then onwards. He did not choose his desire to enter law enforcement, he didn't choose the dream that got torn away from him. He did not choose to be so good at it, too good in fact. He didn't choose for everything to get so messed up and wrong.

Hannibal listens and is understanding and patient and calm and *reasonable*, and it makes Will want to curl up and hide away. He wants to hate him, wants to hate himself for coming here. It's simply not *fair*. He is too tired of it all, the constant fighting and feeling so powerless as he gets shuffled along by the world around him.

He should hate Hannibal but he can't. He should pull away when Hannibal gets up and moves close, when he touches Will's face and frowns. He can't help when he leans against those hands, hot against his face. His eyes slide shut before he can tell himself not to.

Hannibal slides a notepad into his hand and tells him to draw a clock and it's such a strange request. Will does it without thinking much, hands the notepad back at arms length and looks away. He can't look at Hannibal, he just sees his own weakness there when he does.

Will's voice is rough as he speaks and he's not even sure if he really *is* speaking, the whole room swimming and this feeling far too much like one of his stranger dreams. "They say omegas go crazy when they're not mated, that eventually they'll just wither and die without an alpha. An omega losing his mind because he's too weak to exist by himself. I never believed it before...is that what this is? Is this what dying feels like?"

Hannibal takes his hand and brings him to his car and Will follows and wonders when he'll wake up because surely this has to be a dream, real life doesn't tilt like this, Hannibal's hands don't rest on his shoulder when they're together, Hannibal doesn't touch his face like this.

He doesn't remember driving, the scenes flowing together and him finding himself at a new location. It is just a like a dream and the rules of space don't make sense.

There are people and smells and white walls and he's aware he's in a hospital and his heart pounds a little too hard in his chest. He's too confused and tired of fighting to fight some more. He allows the nurses to take his clothes, to strip him bare and redress him in a hospital gown. What is he but his skin and flesh, the abstract parts of him make no sense anyway, they have no value. He is docile and doesn't fight, he's too tired to be more than the ideal of an omega now.

There are noises and tests and lights and voices and people who touch him. It's wrong and it should frighten him more but Hannibal brought him here, Hannibal's smell lingers and he's never far away. Maybe things will be okay after all.

Suddenly it's quiet and empty, and Hannibal is there and he cups Will's face and perhaps this dream isn't so bad after all. Will smiles up at him and thinks that maybe it would be okay to be Hannibal's. He wouldn't treat Will poorly, he might even allow him to have a little freedom. Whatever Will would have to change might even be worth it, if he had the choice.

Hannibal smiles at him but it doesn't reach his eyes. Will cocks his head and wonders what is going to happen now, wonders if Hannibal will offer to save him. He wonders if he's pushed his luck too long. He wonders if the whole world is right, and Will is wrong and everything he's had control over was wrong and the choices he *did* have access to make were the wrong ones. How different his life might have been, if only he'd gone along with what they wanted. How different things would be if only he'd been stupid, too stupid to dream for more, to *want* a different path. How different life would be if he'd had a choice.

"What's wrong with me Hannibal?" Will asks, even if he doesn't want to know the answer.

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Aww Hannibal :P I hope you enjoy! Thank you so much for your awesome comments!

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It would be so easy right now, for Hannibal to take what he wants. He could bundle Will up, bring him home and whisper in his ear; make him believe whatever truth Hannibal decides. How simple it would be to leave Will without any choice.

When Will shows up at his office so lost and distant, his mind half gone, Hannibal sees the possibilities presented to him. Will would not fight now, he cannot fight. He's lost time and his desire to fight back. All Hannibal needs to do is take, and yet he does not.

Will is frightened and pliable. Hannibal has his suspicions and he looks at Will's drawing of a clock and he knows this is serious. He has not felt the desire to protect another like this in many years and it's as though he has no choice in the matter. He brings Will to the hospital and the whole time he waits and worries.

It shouldn't matter to him, what happens to Will. There might have been a time when he would convince himself that it still doesn't, that Will didn't matter to him and it was all a game. He's too far now. It won't be over until he's bound Will to him, only *then* can the game be won. There will be no winner though, simply an end.

He doesn't manage to look like anything other than the worried protective alpha, the kind he scorns daily. He listens to Doctor Sutcliffe and it makes sense; the smell of infection, Will's sleepwalking and lost time, his strange behaviour.

If Hannibal had a choice, he could convince Sutcliffe to lie to Will, to tell him everything is fine. It would be all so easy, *far* too easy. He could *use* this as an excuse to manipulate Will and craft him into whatever he wants. Hannibal isn't too sure what that is any more. The only thing he wants is to protect Will and it's instinct, he knows it. Long suppressed biology opening up and telling him what to do, and he feels as though he has no choice at all but to protect Will, to keep him safe.

It's a new and dangerous position to be in, one Hannibal does not want to be placed in. Bedelia's words chase each other around in his head. *You shall finally understand how the rest of us live our lives.* Perhaps she was right after all. Will's experience of fighting against

the world around him might become Hannibal's own. His question will be whether to fight back too. Is he to be a 'Will' or not?

He watches as Will is placed into a room and hooked up to monitors and a drip and fussed over. He looks up at Hannibal with a face so lost and tired and *scared* that Hannibal knows he's lost himself in this omega. It is too late to turn back now, as deep into this as he is. He doesn't have a choice, that much is clear to him now.

He strokes a hand through Will's hair and it's a testament to how bad Will's condition has become that he doesn't push that hand away. He tells Will that he's going to be okay, that he's sick but he's going to get better. Will looks back at him with a dazed look, as though he's just woken up and isn't quite sure where he is and what is happening.

"It's going to be alright," Hannibal says. "You're sick, have been sick, you're going to get the treatment you need."

Will licks his lips and looks back at him, his eyes showing fear and he grips at the sheets. "Were they right? Is it because I...because I left it too long? Is it because I never mated?" His voice is small and he's clearly too tired and frightened to hear the ridiculousness in his words.

Hannibal strokes his hair and smiles kindly at him. "No Will. You have encephalitis, it's rare; an infection unrelated to your being an omega, mated or not." He enjoys running his fingers through Will's messy hair, enjoys the warmth coming from his skin even if it is far too hot.

Will nods his head slightly and closes his eyes. Hannibal forces himself to stop petting Will's wild hair and pulls his hand back. Will opens his eyes and looks at him. He reaches unsteadily for Hannibal's hand and Hannibal lets him grab on. Will's grip is clumsy and weak, hand shaking. He looks up at Hannibal, blinking a few times before he licks his lips again.

"I don't want you to go," he whispers.

"I'm not going anywhere," says Hannibal and he smiles, a genuine smile showing all the affection he feels. "I'm staying right here." Will nods.

Omegas are known to be more susceptible to certain illnesses and Will has not been the picture of health for some time now. Hannibal worries even as he tells himself things will be fine. He closes his hand around Will's and for a moment he can't even worry over the loss he feels inside himself, the chaos that this part of his life is about to become. He will have a mate; it is going to change everything.

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Will is feeling better....

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

He sleeps and for the first time in too long, it is restful. His sleep is not dreamless and though the subjects of his nightmares come to him, he is not afraid of them. The stag visits him, chasing away all the other creatures in the forest in his mind. They watch each other, and they might talk but Will can't remember their conversations. When he does wake, he can't even remember that the dreams took place at all.

He feels terrible, sore and tired but he's hopeful. He wants to feel like his old self again, the one that existed before all this. Before he was sick, before he felt so lost and before Hannibal made him so very confused. He wants to know his own mind again.

The pleasant rest becomes unpleasant confinement as nurses and doctors come to poke him in his lengthening periods of consciousness. Will does not like Doctor Sutcliffe. The doctor always speaks in such condescending tones and never tells Will exactly what's happening.

Will has visitors, eventually. Hannibal visits a lot and they sit in awkward silences. Hannibal tries to hold his hand and Will pulls away. He doesn't want the alpha thinking that his poor judgement while ill should mean anything now. He fights the urge to allow the alpha to take his hand every day as he reaches for it. He tells himself it's just his biology reacting in a moment of weakness.

Alana brings flowers and he smiles when he sees her. She makes it easy, talking about his recovery and his time in hospital. She doesn't push him, not until he's feeling better and he appreciates it. He knows she was going to press at him for information eventually.

"I was worried about you," she says quietly and he lets her hold his hand.

"My doctor is an asshole but apparently he's the best at this sort of thing," Will says with a wry smile. Alana smiles back and for a brief moment Will feels like they're back to how things were before.

"Abigail wants to visit, I told her to wait until I checked with you," says Alana and Will nods his head against his pillow.

"I'd like that, I think," he says. Perhaps he really would.

”Has Hannibal been by today?” she asks. And Will shakes his head grimly. Hannibal visits most days, and at first it had even been a pleasant event. Now he just dreads the confusing feelings in his stomach when Hannibal shows his face.

”Not yet, I’m sure he will show up eventually.”

Alana frowns at him and pulls her hand from his. “I thought you two were getting along?” She looks disappointed in him and Will isn’t sure why.

”What does it matter? I wasn’t myself.” It’s an excuse, he thinks. As though he can erase the friendship that has taken root. He doesn’t want Hannibal to be his friend, he knows that much for certain.

She drops it, thankfully. She is always so good at knowing when to do that. “The dogs are okay, though Winston misses you terribly, and I’ve arranged for all your classes to be covered. This will certainly put a stop to Jack’s arguments to get you back out into the field.”

”He’s still pushing?” Will asks. He’s surprised Crawford would even *want* him any more. He knows how useless he’s been lately. It’s a miracle they’d even allow him to teach. He picks at the sheets and absently scratches at the I.V. needle in his hand.

”Don’t worry about it Will, you can figure it out when you’re better.”

He knows she means well but he also knows it’s a lie. He’s always going to be punished for not taking the paths others have chosen for him.

He sleeps a lot, even when he starts to feel better and he’s only finishing the course of immunotherapy, he sleeps. It’s a way to pass the time, cooped up in the hospital room with the same cast of characters who come by. He sleeps even though the stag continues to visit him in his dreams.

Hannibal visits a lot, more than he should be when it comes to appearances. Will feels he should be uncomfortable about it, so he pulls away whenever Hannibal arrives. He’s quiet and he acts withdrawn. He tells himself this is how he should act. He doesn’t want Hannibal to get ideas, does he? After a while, Hannibal stops trying to touch him so casually. It should feel like relief but it doesn’t.

He doesn't trust himself, doesn't trust whatever choices he might have made while he was so out of it and sick. Has he been leading Hannibal on this whole time? He wonders if he might have. He's made too many questionable decisions. Will should probably say something about it, make it clear to Hannibal that whatever he implied while suffering from the effects of the encephalitis wasn't *him*. Will can't be held accountable for that *other* Will's actions. It's not fair, is it, for him to have to continue down whatever path his illness allowed him to be steered down? Though he also doesn't think it would change all that much. His life is really just a series of one way streets and closed-off junctions.

Alana brings Abigail to see him, once. She doesn't like being back at a hospital but she holds his hand and smiles at him and things are simpler, for a little while. He doesn't feel like Abigail has some ulterior motive. It's a refreshing change.

Though he has visitors, the cabin fever has set in fully by the end of the second week of consciousness and Will can't wait for the all clear. Even if it means having to go back to Quantico to deal with whatever the investigation into the shooting will bring up. It seems a lifetime ago, that he pulled that trigger. He doesn't want to think about it but it's part of him now. So many new pieces created within himself these past months.

He waits for the doctors to come and poke him and prod him and allow him to go home. He has to wait for someone else to decide what he can and cannot do. It's the same story, over and over, and it never does change.

Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Good things are coming, I promise!

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal brings flowers – then realising how foolish Will would think them, he leaves them in the car. He sees flowers that someone else has brought, most likely Alana, and wonders how they had been received. He smiles at Will when he's unconscious and pets his hair and holds his hand. As the days go by and Will wakes up, he watches as Will pulls his hand away from Hannibal's and looks anywhere but his face. It makes Hannibal angry.

Perhaps it shouldn't, when he thinks about it carefully – he knows he should have expected this. Will is a stubborn creature and isn't that part of his charm? The darkness in him, the spark that originally caught Hannibal's interest, is still there. It would have been foolish to think it would simply be a case of staring him down and telling him to accept Hannibal's claim, especially now that Hannibal feels differently too.

Is the only way for him to have Will for his own going to be when Will isn't even in his right mind? A strong and healthy Will would be glorious; Hannibal can just imagine the sight, he can see it emerging more and more as the days pass and Will grows stronger. Yet perhaps *that* exact Will is the the one that won't have him. He wonders what he's doing, helping Will to become that version of himself. It's the first time he's actively worked against his own goals and yet he cannot help himself. Making Will *happy* seems so important to him right now, despite what he himself *wants* so strongly.

He wants Will, oh how he wants him. He wants to take Will. As much as he suppresses his instincts and knows he can't trust them. He also knows it would feel so good, so *sweet* to make Will his. Is it even a choice any more?

At some point he has lost his choices, lost his desire for twisting Will and seeing him kill. As beautiful as that would be, as wonderful as the idea is to him, he feels ambivalent about it now. As much as he would like Will to join him, to kill, he does not want it to be by manipulation, not like the others. He wants Will to come to him by choice, he wants Will to *want* to be with him of his own free will. He wants something that he did not *decide* to want. It should be against his stronger nature and he cannot explain it.

Hannibal's solitary life had never felt so solitary before. He's never had a problem with spending time with just his own thoughts. His dinner table hasn't felt this lonely before.

Hannibal has friends, *acquaintances*, people who he knows inside and out but who don't know him at all. For the first time he's realising that maybe it does matter to him. There are parts within him that even Will can't touch, but how nice to share even half of himself.

As pleasant as thoughts of Will make him feel, he does not appreciate feeling anxious, he does not like not knowing what his future might hold. He does not like the idea that his future might be in the hands of another. He feels as though he needs to play Will into his arms, needs to convince him that he wants to be Hannibal's too. It would be easier said than done. Will doesn't look him in the eye and he pulls away and makes himself small on the bed, and gives every indication that he does not enjoy Hannibal's visits. Hannibal continues to come despite this; he cannot stay away, as though some invisible force pulls him back again and again.

Hannibal has had many sexual partners over the years. People whom he found aesthetically pleasing, people whom he found interesting, and people whom he wanted to take a small piece of. They live, as far as he knows. They had their time together and then they parted ways. It was a simple exchange, a connection. It always went one way though. As much as his partners enjoyed his bed, he knows the more perceptive of them noticed it. He wonders if Will would be the same way. He wonders what it must be like to have sex with your *mate*. Surely it's a different experience entirely.

Hannibal has had his way with omegas, ones that were even less worried about what society might think than Will is. But Will is different, he is special. As much as he denies it, deep down Will *cares* about the world around him. Despite the position his beloved world has put him in, Will continues to care unconditionally. Hannibal can only dream of a love like that.

How he would love to *be* Will's world, and his thoughts go straight to how he might engineer things for that to happen, how he might manipulate Will into falling for him. Over and over he strikes the thoughts down and reminds himself that it's not what he *wants* – as though he has a choice in the matter.

He keeps visiting, doing his best to show Will that he'll be here, even when ignored. He doesn't know if it's right or not. Hannibal knows he can no longer trust his own judgment of these things, not with hormones and instincts and his *heart* involved. He'll just have to wait, he tells himself again and again. He'll need to wait and yet he finds himself without the patience to do so.

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Two chapters posted today because 32 is rather short! Enjoy :D

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

”Bet you can’t wait to get out of here,” says Alana with a smile. She sits on the side of his bed rather than in the chair, and nudges his legs over. He shifts so she can sit facing him.

”Like you wouldn’t believe. I feel *fine*,” Will says with more of a moaning tone than he intends. “I’m just feeling a lot better,” he adds, muttering.

She grins and pats his leg. “Well I hear they’re letting you out tomorrow. It’s good to see you back to your old self,” she says. Her face goes serious for a moment as she bites her lip. “I mean...well I hope you know what I mean when I say that if you want to talk about *anything* that I’m here for you.” She reaches for his hand and he lets her take it.

Will frowns. “Why do I get the feeling this is about more than work?”

She shakes her head. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be cryptic,” she says and she smiles at him but it’s strained. “Can you believe Jack is still pushing for you to be assigned to him? He’s actually trying to get you transferred full time on the basis that your psychological state was because of your encephalitis, rather than the work he has you do. It’s like he doesn’t even see you as a *person*.” She shakes her head and looks at him. “I’m fighting your corner,” she says earnestly. “Don’t worry, he’s not going to get away with putting you in a position like that.”

Will sighs and looks to the window. “Yeah, he is,” Will says softly. Alana squeezes his hand. “And I’ll go and I’ll do what I can to help catch killers, because I have to.”

”Will,” says Alana softly. He looks back at her. “You don’t have to, you have a choice. It’s honorable of you to want to help, but you can let someone else do it.” She looks at him pleadingly. He smiles sadly at her. It’s sweet of her, to want to protect him like this.

”I wish it was so simple,” he says and he squeezes her hand back briefly. She lets go.

Alana shifts a little on the bed, waits until he looks up at her before speaking. “Things could be simple Will, if you really wanted them to be.” He rolls his eyes.

”You don’t know what it’s like…,” he mutters and turns to look out the window again.

”You’re right, I don’t,” she replies. “But I can imagine, I can *try* to imagine, if you’ll explain it to me.” Will turns back and sees her earnest face and he closes his eyes.

”You’re a psychiatrist, I don’t know why I’m thinking you’re not figuring it all out right now,” he says in annoyance. “Sorry,” he adds, quickly. “I just mean, all this shit is because I’m an omega and I *know* you’ve studied omega psychology but...I don’t know, I’m guessing most of the books are written by people who *aren’t* omegas.”

She smiles and reaches for his hand again. He folds his arms and she gives up. “You’re not exactly correct Will.” She sighs and tilts her head. “Tell me Will, why are you so eager to go out and save the world when you feel like it hates you?”

”Is *that* what you think?” he asks in disbelief. She shrugs and he shakes his head at her. “I don’t hate the world I just...I hate being an omega, I hate not having any power over anything. I work hard on my career and I don’t get to choose what I do in it, I just...I get sent wherever will have me, wherever I’m not too…*unstable* to work.” He hunches his shoulders more. Alana pats his arm.

”Will you’re an omega, it’s who you are,” she says softly. “Is it all so terrible? You have things outside of work that make you happy.”

”I have my dogs and...you, I hope,” he looks up at her from under his hair. She nods at him. “You’re a good friend,” he says quietly. “Even when I’m being an asshole.”

”You’re not an asshole Will,” she says with a laugh. She grabs for his hand again and he lets her take it this time. “And I thought you had a little more going on in your life than that.” She winks at him and he frowns in confusion. “Another uh, *friend*,” she says. His eyes widen as he realises what she means. He tries to pull his hand away but she holds on tight.

”No Alana, woah, where did you get that idea? Did...did Hannibal *say* something to you?” He fights down the little thrill of excitement he feels at the thought that Hannibal would feel something important enough for him to want to *share* it.

She laughs at him softly but then tilts her head. “I kind of thought you two were, um...whatever it is that alphas and omegas do when they like each other….” she trails off and narrows her eyes at him. “Hannibal hasn’t *said* anything to me, and neither have you. I just got the impression, that’s all. You just seemed to enjoy spending time together. If it’s not the case that’s fine, I’ll drop it.”

Will bites his lip. He ignores the little flip flop in his belly and instead worries about what Alana might be thinking. What has he said or done that’s made her think he’s *interested* in Hannibal that way. What might *Hannibal* have done? His behaviour must have been worse while he was ill than he thought.

”You know,” says Alana quietly. “I promise I’ll drop it but just one thing Will.” He looks at her and purses his lips. “You could just do what normal people do and *get it out of your system*.” She winks again and Will tugs his hand away for good this time. She giggles at him. “I’m sorry Will,” she says between giggles. “I don’t mean to make fun but the two of you are ridiculous!”

”See? It’s *this* stuff, all this little stupid shit...I mean I can’t even have an alpha friend without people talking. That’s how stupid the world is!” Will shifts down the bed and glares at her.

She sobers and her face grows serious. She sits up straight and looks at him gravely. “Will, I’m not joking with you, I’m not making fun, I just want to know something, as a friend.” He looks at her with suspicion. “You and Hannibal,” she continues, “is there really nothing there?”

He bites his lip and hesitates. The longer he takes to think, the more suspicious it looks. He can see it on her face. “No,” he says finally. He looks away. “Nothing has happened between us.” He thinks for a moment that he hears disappointment in his own voice but that would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it?

She pats his knee. “Okay,” she says brightly. It sounds as though she’s full of false sunniness. “Well, not long ‘til you’re home anyway. I’m going to pick you up okay? I’m sure you’ll like seeing the dogs, and I know they can’t wait to see you.” Her whole shift in demeanor feels wrong, and Will is suspicious but he’s always suspicious. It’s wearing on him greatly. He smiles back. It’s easier this way.

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

I think some of you might like this chapter ;D

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal meets with Doctor Sutcliffe in his office and they smile and laugh like the old friends they supposedly are. Hannibal has never been a particularly big fan of the other man but he likes having him on his side. He knows friends can be valuable.

They speak for a while and Sutcliffe uses those words that seem to be thrown about a lot lately. “Here to pick up *your* omega?” Hannibal enjoys hearing them. Will isn’t his yet, but it’s only a matter of time.

”Yes, you’ve given him the all clear?” Hannibal asks as he makes his way to the door of the office. He would hide his eagerness to see Will but he’s past caring. He even looks forward to the long car journey to Will’s house.

Sutcliffe is too busy to take him to fetch Will. It suits Hannibal perfectly, he knows the way, he’s visited Will’s room most days these past weeks. Hannibal breezes through the hospital. He stops at the nurses station to collect the bag that Alana left with them holding Will’s things in it. The nurse on duty hands it over, recognising him immediately. As he walks towards Will’s room he hears one of them say something to another nurse and it makes Hannibal smile. “Oh yes, he’s Will Graham’s alpha.”

His good mood deflates quickly when he sees the look on Will’s face. Surprise turns quickly to annoyance. Will is sitting up in the bed, flicking through the pages of a magazine. He drops it to his lap and folds his arms across his chest. “No point in a visit,” he says coldly. “Alana is on her way to pick me up.”

Hannibal stands inside the doorway, holding the plastic bag with Will’s clothes and he frowns at the omega sitting in the bed. “Well Alana seems to believe that *I* am picking you up, and since I am here, that does seem to be the case.”

Will opens and closes his mouth before he blurts out the thought they’ve both come to at the same time. “She did this on purpose, didn’t she?” Hannibal shakes his head and smiles at whatever Alana is up to. Will just looks more annoyed, if that’s possible.

Will makes low noises of irritation as he pushes the sheets down and then looks up at Hannibal. “Turn around,” he orders. Hannibal raises his eyebrows, but he complies. He hears

Will stand up and move towards him and he hopes that soon Will won't resist when Hannibal decides to look upon him. Will grabs the bag from Hannibal's hand, down by his side, and goes into the bathroom. Hannibal hears the sound of the lock and he shakes his head before settling himself in the empty chair by the bed.

Will emerges dressed and in serious need of a shave and a haircut. Hannibal remembers how Will looked in a tuxedo, and imagines the whole picture when Will allows him to style his hair and shave his beard. He likes the picture quite a bit.

Will is sullen as they make their way to the desk to get him signed out. Will avoids looking Hannibal's way and it weighs on him more than he thinks it *should*.

Will refuses the wheelchair and Hannibal resists the urge to stare him down and order him to sit in it. Will is in a delicate place and Hannibal knows he has to be careful, even if he does not wish to be.

They get settled into Hannibal's car and Will stares resolutely through the side window. He ignores Hannibal as they pull out of the parking lot. Hannibal drives in silence for the first stretch before he begins attempting conversation.

"I'm sorry, for the unintended ambush," Hannibal says. "...again," he adds as an afterthought. Will grunts in response but doesn't move from his position. "I just wanted to make it clear that this is not my doing, I believe Alana wanted us to spend this time together, for her own reasons."

Will turns to look at him. "You didn't put her up to it?" he asks in a voice that sounds like he's certain this is all Hannibal's idea.

"I did not."

Will turns to look out at the road and frowns. "She seems to think that there are personal feelings involved here. I wonder how she got that idea."

"Alana is an experienced and talented psychiatrist Will. She is also very observant." Hannibal glances sideways to see Will gnawing on his lip. He waits rather than saying more, hoping the words will do as intended.

"While I was sick…" says Will, his voice measured in a clear attempt to avoid the emotion attached to the situation. "...did my behaviour lead you to believe that I had, um…*romantic intentions* towards you?"

"And if it did?" asks Hannibal. He grips the steering wheel a little tighter, leans forward in his seat just a little bit.

"It...it wasn't intentional, I didn't mean to – ugh, *lead you on*." Will frowns. "I hate that term, some alphas think an omega just existing is a come on."

"I don't," says Hannibal carefully.

Will leans forward in his seat a little, tugging at his seatbelt before flopping back against the headrest. “I can’t put anything right at the moment, can I?” he asks. Hannibal assumes it’s rhetorical and remains silent. “I didn’t mean...I just.” Will takes a deep breath. “I’m sorry if anything I did had the result of you thinking that I was um, open to that kind of thing.”

”You mean that you were interested in being courted?” asks Hannibal.

Will thumps his head back against the headrest, hard. “Ugh yeah, I guess. I’m *not*, I’m not interested in any of that stuff. Alphas, mating, y’know.”

”May I ask if there’s a reason?”

Will splutters a little. “Do I *need* one? I’m just...I don’t want an alpha, that’s all.” He crosses his arms and returns to staring out of the side window.

”I’m sorry Will, I just want to understand,” says Hannibal. “I’ll admit, I have enjoyed your company in the time that I’ve known you, and I believed that you had enjoyed mine. I cannot help the way in which my biology has reacted to you.” Hannibal feels his heart speed up despite himself and he frowns. He can’t make sense of this, and he at least recognises his hormones might be to blame for the state he finds himself in.

Hannibal waits for Will to respond but he does not. They drive in silence and Hannibal battles with the logical part of himself over the urge to say something. He is still a logical being, at his heart, despite the ravage his emotions seem intent on playing. He focuses on driving and the time passes too slowly as they make their way to Will’s house.

Hannibal can’t help but cling to the steering wheel tighter as they get closer to their destination. He had looked up the route beforehand, memorised it with a glance and now he can’t control how that mind calculates how much time they have left in the car together. He tries to choose what to say but he can’t.

Thankfully, Will speaks, eventually. “I liked that you weren’t like those other alphas who let their hormones lead the way,” he says quietly.

”You think I’ve changed?” asks Hannibal. He knows the truth of it, he cannot help the changes that have come over him.

”I don’t know,” says Will. “Maybe we both have. I like spending time with you but...I just can’t, I can’t *be* with an alpha. Not the way I think you want.” He goes back to gnawing on his lip.

Will’s house comes into view and Hannibal’s eyes scan across the outside of it. “What do you think I want?” he asks. “And why can’t you give it?”

Will sighs. “You want a nice little omega to hang on your arm, and you’re barking up the wrong tree.” He turns to look at Hannibal and Hannibal glances back at him. “I think you’re crazy; I’d make a terrible omega for any alpha. I convinced myself that you couldn’t be interested for too long. Call it denial, but it’s pretty clear we’d be a terrible match.”

Hannibal frowns and feels that unfamiliar stir of discomfort in his gut. He doesn't like it. "You hate the world telling you what you should do and want, and yet you seem insistent on telling me what I should want." He pulls up in front of Will's house. Will starts fumbling with his seatbelt. "Will," says Hannibal firmly. Will pauses and looks at him. It's the first sustained eye contact they've had in far too long. "I don't want you to be anything else but what you are, and I'd hope you'd grant me the same courtesy."

"And when you finally see how messed up I am, and that it can't all be explained away so easily by an infection?" Will asks.

"Do you think I only like the *idea* of you? Is that what you think this is? I must be a truly terrible psychiatrist to not know you at all by now, Will."

Will pauses, and his eyes wander over Hannibal's face for a moment that seems to last far too long. He bites his lip and a look of confusion crosses his face.

"Will," says Hannibal, gearing up to say more, to express all the thoughts and arguments that he has on the tip of his tongue. He has points that will no doubt sway Will to accept him. He knows he needs to bring out all the best arguments to persuade him.

Will closes the gap between them and cuts off the half-formed word in Hannibal's mouth with his own. His lips are warm and dry and the kiss is lacking in any grace or art. Will presses his lips chastely at first, but then his hand clutches at Hannibal's jacket and his tongue licks at Hannibal's lips. Hannibal brings his hand up and cups Will's head far more gently than his instincts scream at him to. Their lips part slightly; he licks at Will's lips and they're *kissing*, and the knot in Hannibal's stomach that's been sitting there far too long loosens itself a little.

Hannibal feels Will pull back and he doesn't want to let go but he does. Will's eyes are wide and he looks horrified. "I shouldn't have done that," he gasps. He sits back in his seat breathing hard.

"Why not?" asks Hannibal quietly.

Will looks at him sideways. "I don't even know why I did that."

"I assume you wanted to," says Hannibal. "Does there need to be more of a reason than that?"

Will bites his lip again and Hannibal watches him do it, the gesture feeling different now that he knows how those lips *taste*. "I'm sorry," says Will.

"Don't be," says Hannibal. Will looks at him, confused. "I wanted it too."

Will's hand goes for the door handle and he lets himself out, clutching the plastic bag with his old clothes and belongings to his chest. He doesn't look back as he makes his way up to his house, and Hannibal watches him unlock the door and go inside. He sits in the car for a little too long, watching and thinking before he pulls the car away from the house and makes his

way back towards the main roads. He can’t control the smile that creeps in from the corners of his mouth.

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

You guys are amazing, thank you for your comments and kudos! <3

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will returns to work and he can't help but feel like it's his first day all over again. He gets the distinct impression that they've been managing fine without him. There are a new group of trainees and he has to start all over again with proving himself to them. By the end of the day he's exhausted.

He checks his work mail and finds that Beverly has left him another casefile. He does not read it. He puts the various memos and notes in his bag and considers going through them later, but right now all he wants is to go home and relax with his dogs. He ponders going fishing in the morning, and the vague memory of Hannibal asking to be taught how to fish swims to the surface of Will's mind. He shakes his head but it doesn't clear.

Will feels healthier but he still doesn't feel *right*; he admonishes himself for feeling disappointed in that. He always knew he had too many demons and problems to be normal, it would be foolish to think some immunotherapy and a hospital stay could truly *fix* him. He can't help but wonder what exactly is *wrong* though. His nightmares don't disturb him the same way, the monsters don't frighten him when he dreams of them. He wonders if he's growing used to it again, and if that means he'll soon be back out in the field working active cases. Perhaps the old monsters could keep the new ones in line, as much as he doubts the possibility.

Will finds himself turning one way instead of the other as he drives out of Quantico and hits the road. He isn't sure why he is following this route, only that he *wants* to and deep down inside he's sick of fighting that part of himself.

He pulls up outside Hannibal's office and finds the door locked and the lights off, and he wants to kick himself for even coming here. He goes and sits in his car for far too long, staring at the steering wheel.

He eventually shakes himself, gives a small shudder and he asks what he came here for – what he even *wants*. He second guesses his decision even as he pulls out from the kerb and continues on his journey.

The lights at Hannibal's house are on, his car is outside and Will finds his breath coming too fast. He parks and sits and looks at the building, and fights down the little voice asking him again what he's doing. He gets out of the car and goes to the door and rings the bell.

Hannibal smiles when he see him. He's wearing a white apron over his clothes and he ushers Will inside, insisting he stay for the dinner Hannibal is preparing.

Soon enough there's a glass of wine in Will's hand and he's sitting on a kitchen stool watching Hannibal cook; it feels familiar but not comfortable. He drains his wine, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows before pouring him another glass.

"It's a pleasant surprise to see you," says Hannibal and he smiles. Will looks at Hannibal's hands rather than his face. He watches the man slicing vegetables with confident elegant movements. He sips at his wine, showing more restraint as he considers the ramifications of getting drunk right now.

"I'm not sure why I came," says Will as he watches Hannibal's hands pause in their movements. "I wanted to see you, I guess." Hannibal resumes slicing and preparing the food. They sit in silence punctuated by the steady sound of Hannibal's knife sliding expertly against his chopping board. Soon he's done and he's ready to move to the next step of his recipe.

"I wasn't expecting company," says Hannibal as he heats oil in the pan. "I'm just making something simple."

"Since when is anything you do simple?" asks Will. Hannibal does not answer, he must know the question doesn't need one. Will forces himself to put the glass down before he finishes it. "About the other day," he says, hoping the rest of the words will come to him as he speaks but finding himself lost. He looks up at Hannibal's face. Hannibal tilts his head thoughtfully.

"When you kissed me," Hannibal supplies. Will picks at his cuticles absently-mindedly.

"Yes, when I kissed you," he says. "I don't know why I did that and I...well I'd apologise but you did kiss me back." Will bites his lip and looks down at his hands.

"You seem to enjoy making things complicated," says Hannibal as he begins sautéing the onion. "You wanted to kiss me and I wanted to be kissed. Let us leave it at that."

Will nods, despite the worries chasing around inside his head. "I guess I'm not used to being spontaneous."

"I'm glad you don't think it was a mistake," says Hannibal as he begins adding more ingredients to the pan.

"I don't think I said that," says Will. He pulls his lip between his teeth again and looks up at Hannibal. "But I guess I don't regret it, if that's what you mean." Hannibal smiles at him.

They sit in silence for a while as Hannibal completes his dish with more ingredients than Will can name. The smell is heavenly and Will feels his mouth water. Hannibal makes up plates

and spends much longer garnishing them than Will thinks is absolutely necessary. Especially when Will considers that Hannibal wasn't expecting any company.

They sit in Hannibal's dining room facing each other and Hannibal lights some candles. The whole thing feels far more important than it really should. Will clutches his wineglass, but then he forces himself to let it go and leave it sitting on the table. He really can't afford to get drunk.

They eat and the food is good, fantastic even. It has a name in French that Will can't understand or remember but he does enjoy how the words fall from Hannibal's tongue when he serves the dishes. Will can't help but close his eyes over each savoured mouthful. For such a supposedly simple dish, the flavours are layered and complex and utterly *delicious*. Will enjoys the meal, especially after his experiences with hospital food.

"There's something bothering you," says Hannibal as he places his knife and fork down and pushes his empty plate forward. Will wants to roll his eyes and say something sarcastic but he settles for something between a nod and a shrug.

"I'm just, I don't know how to say it, if I *should* say anything," Will says absently.

"So try it, I'd like to think you can talk to me about almost anything Will." Hannibal looks at him expectantly and Will frowns.

"It's harder than it sounds," he says quietly. "It's biology versus *me* isn't it?"

"I believe we spoke before," says Hannibal. "about where the line between the two lay."

"And at the time I thought it was stupid but now I'm not so sure, maybe you're right."

"Thank you," says Hannibal with a soft chuckle. "It's nice to know I'm not completely out of touch." Will rolls his eyes again and reaches for his wineglass. Perhaps he needs the courage the alcohol will grant after all.

"I guess I can't help but think...does it matter where the feelings come from?" He swallows another mouthful of wine and holds the glass firmly. He rests it against the table to help steady his hand. "I don't know, I guess maybe I'm more worried about the consequences."

"Will," says Hannibal, his voice low and comfortingly steady. "Consequences are one thing, what you truly want is another." Will looks up at him and frowns. He brings the wineglass to his lips and drains the rest. He can't care about sobriety any longer.

Will reaches for the bottle of wine and unsteadily pours himself another glass. He fills it beyond what Hannibal would probably deem the correct level. He can't care anymore. "What if I'm worried about what people will think?" he asks before swallowing down more of the wine.

"Like who?" asks Hannibal. "Jack? Alana?"

Will nods. "Sure, them and everyone else. I don't want to...give in. What about you, I don't know what you think of me, Doctor Lecter." He sees a momentary look of hurt cross

Hannibal's features but it's lost too quickly to really register.

"You think this is just about sex?" asks Hannibal. Will can't help but wince at the word. Hannibal must notice because he expands on it quickly. "I mean, connecting, as an omega with an alpha."

"What if I...what if I wanted it to just be about sex?" asks Will. He closes his eyes for a moment, regretting the words but picturing Alana's nod of approval. He remembers her telling him to just *get it out of his system*. He's not sure what he's even doing any more. He brings the wineglass to his mouth again but stops halfway and puts it down. He doesn't want to blame the wine.

"I'm something that you feel you can get out of your system, as you put it?" asks Hannibal. Will doesn't look at him so he can't tell how disappointed or interested in the proposition the other man might be.

"I don't know," says Will in a small uncertain voice. "All I know is that I don't want to stay away from you. I don't want this to be...out of my control." He finally looks up at Hannibal's face. "I want this to be my choice," he says firmly.

Hannibal looks at him calmly. Will can feel Hannibal's eyes studying his own face right back. Hannibal stands and moves around the table to him and Will feels the tremor in his hand. He presses his palms against the table. Hannibal reaches his side and he takes Will's hand in his own, guiding him to stand.

"So here is your choice," says Hannibal softly. "You can either put on your coat, go outside, get in your car and drive home, or you can stay here, with me, and we can see where this goes."

Will swallows hard and looks up into Hannibal's eyes. Perhaps this choice is just another illusion, like all of the others. He doesn't know whether whatever he has decided will have truly been a decision made freely. This time, all he knows is which option he *wants* and the decision is made.

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

Extremely long chapter incoming! I hope this chapter was worth the wait ;D

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

When their lips press together, Hannibal knows without a doubt that he is lost. He cups Will's jaw and must hold back on his instinct to press forward and *claim* what he knows is his. He allows Will to lead at first, kissing Hannibal hesitantly, with a shyness that perhaps shouldn't be there for their second kiss.

They make their way through the house, Hannibal leading Will by the hand. Will's breathing is fast and he's clearly attempting to keep it under control, but failing. "Hannibal," he gasps as he's pulled forward towards the bottom of the stairs. "I don't, I think you should know...I've never…" The words make something in Hannibal take over in joyous possessiveness. Will is *his*, he thinks, as he presses Will against the wall, sniffing against his neck – and for the first time, he's the animal he's always been, deep inside.

Will goes lax as he allows his own instinct to take over and Hannibal licks the skin of his neck, tasting his skin and sweat and pheromones, and feeling the overwhelming urge to possess.

Will's foot slips on the edge of the stairs and for a moment they're both teetering, pressed together and in danger of falling. Will pulls his mouth free and gasps and clutches at the wall behind him. Hannibal comes to his senses long enough to regain his balance and pull Will against him, holding him tight. Will's hands go to his shoulders and he looks up at Hannibal with big confused eyes.

"I'm not supposed to want this," he says in a dazed voice. His fingers run along Hannibal's neck and the contact makes Hannibal shiver involuntarily.

"Let's leave the world outside," says Hannibal softly. He takes the first stair and pulls Will after him. "Let's just do what we both *want* tonight." Will follows him.

There's a moment of panic on Will's face when they reach the bedroom door and he stops in the doorway. Hannibal takes his wrist and gently pulls before Will's feet are moving. His eyes fix on the bed and Hannibal follows his gaze. "It's alright," Hannibal whispers. "We can stop if you want." He regrets saying the words. He does not *want* to stop but he also does not

want this to be a one time thing. He holds his breath as Will frowns and bites his lip. Will finally breaks his intent stare at the large bed.

”No,” Will says firmly. “I want this too, I just….” He takes a deep breath and pulls his hand away from Hannibal. “This isn’t mating,” he says to the ground before looking up at Hannibal’s face. “Condoms and, and no biting or knotting okay?”

”You’re not in heat Will,” says Hannibal, before he can kick himself for trying to press the issue. He should be grateful to have gotten this far – but his every instinct tells him he needs *more*, he needs *everything*. It will have to come in time. He will not try and force a heat. Will shakes his head and Hannibal sighs. “Yes Will, condoms, I do have some, luckily...and I won’t bite you and I won’t knot you.” It hurts to say it but he means it, he’ll have to hold onto his control just that much longer.

There’s a pause between them where they both stand unmoving, watching one another. Hannibal’s instincts scream at him to move forward and *dominate*, but he fights them down as hard as he can.

It’s Will that closes the small gap, pressing himself against Hannibal’s body lightly. He reaches trembling hands up to Hannibal’s face. Hannibal allows him to guide their lips together once more, and their kiss is familiar enough while still hinting at the infinite possibilities they have left to explore. Hannibal takes the opportunity he has waited too long for, allowing his hands to travel along Will’s back. His fingers find the edge of his shirt and he pulls it from Will’s waistband, slipping his fingers between fabric to touch skin.

Will jerks at the contact but he continues to kiss Hannibal. It is Hannibal who breaks the contact between their mouths and Will looks up at him, blinking in confusion. Hannibal smiles and unbuttons the top button on Will’s shirt.

As he opens Will’s shirt, images of all the fleeting glances that Hannibal has gotten of Will’s body flash into his mind. He pushes the fabric down Will’s shoulders and swallows as he takes in the sight of his nipples and the sparse dusting of hair that leads in a trail down into his pants.

Will looks back at him, an uncertain look on his face with his breath a little too quick for simply standing. Hannibal traces a fingertip along Will’s sternum and down the line of his stomach. Will shudders delightfully and Hannibal smiles. He has to remind himself to hold back, that he cannot push Will down and *take*. Another time.

Will frees his hands from the shirt and drops it to the floor; standing uncertainly for a moment before finding the confidence to reach for the buttons on Hannibal’s waistcoat. Hannibal watches him and smiles. He enjoys the sight of Will’s hesitant movements growing the slightest bit more confident with each passing moment.

Will frees the last button from its’ hole and reaches for Hannibal’s shoulders to slide the fabric away, but Hannibal has other ideas. He rests his hands on Will’s hips and crowds him back towards the bed. Will’s fingers dig at Hannibal’s shoulders in sharp alarm as his knees hit the back of the bed, and then he’s off his feet. He breathes hard and looks up at Hannibal. He pushes himself up onto his elbows.

Hannibal crouches down and starts pulling Will's shoes off. He looks up and enjoys the angle, following the line up Will's torso to his *neck*, and he can almost taste Will's pulse hammering away from here.

Will's breathing is a series of audible panting noises that Hannibal has to tune out in order to keep his hands steady. He strips off Will's socks and runs his fingertips along his bare ankles for a moment, before he's straightening up to stand looking at Will.

Will looks scared, but he licks his lips and reaches a hand out to Hannibal nonetheless. Hannibal smiles, needing to take extra notice of that voice telling him to stay in control. The urge to fall on Will and devour him is strong.

Hannibal reaches forward to the waistband of Will's pants and his last items of clothing. Will's breath catches – he moves his right hand halfway to stop what's going on before he falls back onto the bed, his arms collapsing out from under him. He lies prostrate and still. Hannibal does not pause, he cannot pause, and he unbuttons Will's fly and quickly pulls his pants down. He catches the waistband of Will's boxers with his thumbs and pushes them down. They catch for a moment on Will's erection and Will throws an arm across his eyes to hide.

He should not hide, thinks Hannibal as he takes in the glorious sight before him. Hannibal pulls the pants free of Will's legs and he's naked, laid out and *perfect*. Hannibal can scent the arousal and omega pheromones in the air. He can smell the dampness between Will's legs and he feels himself grow painfully hard in response. His every instinct screams at him, louder and louder, to mount and fuck and knot and *take* – but he holds tight to his control. He must.

Will peeks out from behind his arm and looks up at Hannibal. The worried look from earlier creases his forehead again. "Hannibal?" he says softly.

"It's okay," says Hannibal, keeping his voice low and soothing. "I just enjoy looking at you."

Will's face flushes then, not brightly, but enough for Hannibal to see the subtle change in him. Hannibal smiles and with a cautious pause, Will smiles back. "Can I see you?" asks Will. The shyness of his voice, the sudden trepidation and worry that transforms the man in front of him, makes Hannibal feel a warmth inside. He enjoyed the angry Will who hid this shyness before, but to see him forced to embrace his inexperience is something that Hannibal finds most endearing.

Hannibal loosens his tie. He looks into Will's eyes as he slowly strips the clothing from his body. He wonders if he is the first alpha that Will has seen *all of*, in the flesh. He thinks that might be the case, and not simply wishful thinking. He turns and lays each item of clothing gently across the chair pressed against the wall. He lines his shoes up next to one another and behind him Will sits up on the bed. Hannibal turns as he opens his pants and takes them off. Will licks his lips as he watches Hannibal undress. Will moves his fingers to close around his half hard cock and begins to stroke himself.

Hannibal doesn't manage to suppress the growl that claws its way out of his throat. He doesn't want Will to touch, not when every fibre of him is screaming out that his hand is

touching what belongs to Hannibal. Will freezes at the sound and looks at him, still and unmoving, eyes wider than they've ever looked before.

"I don't care if this is just biology," says Will, voice barely above a whisper. "I know what I want right now." He swallows and Hannibal watches the way his adam's apple bobs up and down. Hannibal feels the urge to bite and claim, and he blinks rapidly to clear the image. He stands naked in front of Will and they regard one another, eyes roving across each other's bodies.

Hannibal cannot stand still any longer. He strides forward and leans down and presses against Will – it feels so good, to pin him down and feel Will's body underneath his own. Will lies still, instinct taking over perhaps. He looks into Hannibal's eyes and licks his lips, and it's the perfect invitation. Hannibal kisses him once again.

He explores Will's lips and tongue and mouth with his own. He explores the skin on Will's neck with one hand as he leans his weight to the other. Hannibal feels the brush of the flesh of his thighs against the outside of Will's, and he instinctively knows he must spread Will's thighs wide to press inside, to join them.

Will twists his face away to the side, breath gasping. He's shaking and Hannibal props himself up further to see his face. He strokes the side of Will's face softly until Will looks at him.

"Are you alright?" asks Hannibal. His alpha instincts are simultaneously telling him to care for Will and *dominate* him, to worry and to *fuck*. He's torn in different directions; it would be so easy to give in to either and let the instincts fight it out – see what comes out victorious. Hannibal must remain in control though, he knows this. Staying in control gives him a choice in the matter.

"Sorry," says Will. "Just a little overwhelming, all this…*contact*." He wriggles his body a little as if to demonstrate and Hannibal feels his hard cock bump against his lower stomach. Despite Will's trepidation, he *wants* this. The thought alone makes Hannibal need to grit his teeth for a moment and think about other less sexual things.

Hannibal cups Will's face with his free hand and he presses his closed mouth against Will's for a brief, chaste kiss. His lips are moving before he can stop them and his voice is saying: "If you need to stop, we can." Hannibal isn't sure what crazy part of himself would offer Will a way out like that.

Will shakes his head. "If I wanted to stop, you would. Knowing that's enough." Hannibal runs a fingertip along the side of Will's face. He sees all of Will's insecurity and worry right there, every battle inside himself, every time he worries about his own free will or lack thereof. Hannibal smiles and nods at Will. It isn't even a lie, he knows he has the self-control to stop, if necessary.

Will turns his head then, tilts it to the side – baring the line of his neck. The gesture of submission makes Hannibal's breath catch and his alpha instincts claw at his insides, telling him to bite and claim the flesh laid before him. He cannot resist the allure and he runs his tongue along it, tasting sweat and the remnants of some cheap cologne and *Will*. He pulls his

head back before he loses his control and sinks his teeth in. He remembers his promise to refrain from biting, whether the promise was freely made or not.

Hannibal kisses and explores and tastes everything before him. He feels Will's own hesitant touches along his back, growing in confidence as they cover more skin. Hannibal wants to suck on Will's neck and mark him there, wants to sink his teeth in and bruise and draw blood. He *wants* so intently, and yet he does not act on these urges.

Hannibal moves his knees and nudges between Will's legs, bringing them even closer as Will parts his thighs and they settle against one another. Their cocks – hard and they press and rub together, and Hannibal considers the intimate pleasure of seating himself inside Will and how wonderful that is going to feel.

He rocks his hips a little at first, then further so he's rubbing the length of his cock against Will's skin; it's rough and uncomfortable but he can barely hold himself back. He needs to move. He pushes himself up on his arms and looks down at Will. Will looks up at him, a little dazed and breathless, emanating the kind of pheromones that would drive a lesser alpha into a full uncontrolled rut. Hannibal scents the air and knows he cannot draw this out any longer.

"I want you," he says in a low voice. Will bites his lip and looks up at him. He spreads his legs a little wider, opening himself more.

"I want you to have me," Will replies in a whisper. Hannibal enjoys everything about this moment. He likes the flush of Will's face and his quickened breaths. He likes his position between Will's spread thighs and most of all, he likes Will's choice of words. Will is an omega and he is an alpha: it is time to do what should come naturally.

Hannibal forces himself to pull away from their position of close contact, as much as he is loathe to do so. He moves swiftly to the bedside drawer, rooting for the condoms and pulling out the lube. He tosses them onto the bed beside Will and hunches over him, running his hands along Will's belly, his hips, thighs, inside his legs and pushing them apart. Will does not offer much resistance, but his breathing is quick and Hannibal can sense the excitement and trepidation in *his* omega.

Hannibal runs his thumbs down along the crease of Will's thighs, hands spread wide across the flesh to part Will's legs further. Will's scent is stronger here and he sees the wet patch on the bed, and smiles at the knowledge that they won't need any extra lubrication for their first time together. Will has provided.

Hannibal gets the condom out of the wrapper and rolls it on. He can't remember his hands shaking with anticipation any other time. He would take a moment to ponder what about Will is so special, why he wants *this* omega so much, but he's too caught up. He's using all his mind to hold back from falling on Will and rutting, so he can't spend the time the thought would take to analyse.

Hannibal returns his hands to the soft skin of Will's inner thighs. He slides his index finger down along Will's perineum and he looks up Will's body. Will has his head thrown back on the bed, looking up at the ceiling, and he's trying to breathe calmly. He's failing at that, his breaths are fast little pants that jerk his chest, and he's covered in a light sheen of sweat – he's

beautiful. It forces Hannibal to pause and enjoy for a moment, but a brief one, since his self-control can only do so much.

His finger slips into Will's hole easily. He's tight but *wet*. There's a moment when he wonders if he'll be able to stop himself from lining up, pushing in and fucking Will immediately. He takes a breath and remembers his control. He slips a second finger in. Will makes a low sound, not discomfort but not delight either, merely an acknowledgement of Hannibal's fingers inside his body. Hannibal presses them apart slightly in the hot wet channel.

Will makes that sound again, shifting to a higher register, the neediness in it becoming more audible. It almost sounds like *please*, which just makes Hannibal's cock ache all the more. He slips his fingers from Will's hole and wipes the slick off on the bed.

"Just relax," Hannibal whispers as he lines his cock up. He's not sure for whose benefit the words are really. He presses forward – Will gasps and it's *tight*, but he continues to push forward until he's starting to slip inside. Will is a tunnel of heat around him. He presses forward more, forcing himself to slow down and move at a steady pace rather than the frantic rutting his body *wants*. He's holding his breath, and he only becomes aware of it when he starts to feel lightheaded. He wonders if this can all be explained by the lack of oxygen.

There's a point of pressure just inside and Will grunts as Hannibal pushes past it. "Relax," Hannibal whispers. Will does. He slides his head to the side more, exposing the side of his neck for Hannibal to sniff and lick if he wants. He *wants*, but he can't allow himself to. His self-control is a knife edge that he could slip from at any moment. He needs to *not* bite Will, needs to remember himself.

The first roll of his hips is exquisite and Will can't hold back his voice as he moans. The sound makes Hannibal's mouth water and his teeth itch to sink into Will's flesh. He pulls out again to ready himself to push back, and Will reaches unsteady hands up to grab at Hannibal. His fingers claw weakly at Hannibal's arms, uncoordinated and uncertain in their movements.

As Hannibal gets into the rhythm of fucking, Will arches under him and pulls his knees higher. His breaths are gasping pants and his grasping fingers find Hannibal's arms. His eyes are glazed, his face flushed and beautiful. He smiles and moans and his pheromones flood the room with the scent of his pleasure. Hannibal watches him and everything about the picture tells him that this omega is *his*. He fucks harder than he probably should. He'd planned to go gently and slowly and tenderly. He can't stop each push of his hips, it feels too good and holding back from biting and staying aware of his state is taking all of his control.

Hannibal can feel completion nearing and as much as he tries to think of other things, to push back the release, his mind is drawn right back to how Will looks and smells and feels. He focuses on getting ready to pull out as he feels his knot start to swell. It's difficult, too difficult, he does not *want* to pull out but he must.

Will brings his legs up and wraps them around Hannibal's waist and pulls him closer and his fingers dig into Hannibal's biceps. "Need you deeper," Will says in a breathy moan and the words could make a lesser alpha come right then and there.

Hannibal wants to, he wants to push deep and feel how good his cock would feel buried deep in Will's ass while his knot locked them together. He can imagine how wonderful the tight wet heat of Will would feel wrapped around him. He can also imagine the way Will would react to him breaking a promise, even if it was a hastily made one.

"I promised you I wouldn't knot you," says Hannibal, between gritted teeth. He forces his hips to still and it grants him a small reprieve from the building orgasm and thickening knot. Will's fingers lose their grip on his arms and Will flops to the bed limply. He looks at Hannibal, his eyes clearing a little.

"Oh,"Will says softly. He looks to the side and he loosens his legs from Hannibal's waist. Hannibal expects him to say something else but he doesn't. Hannibal can sense the shift in mood and he doesn't like it. He leans his weight on one arm to free his hand to reach between them and find Will's erection. He's still hard. He gasps when Hannibal closes his fingers around it and his face snaps back to Hannibal's, eyes wide.

Hannibal squeezes and strokes Will's cock as he pulls his own back. It's difficult, the tightness of Will's hole feels so good around the base of his knot, already begun to grow thick. He thrusts shallowly, not pushing deep like he *wants*. Will's fingers scrabble against the covers and he moans as Hannibal finds a rhythm in the movement of his hand.

It feels good but it's not what Hannibal *wants*. He's fucking Will, but not the way he wants to fuck him. He wants to hold Will down and he wants to bite him. He wants to dominate and knot and take and *own* Will. His instincts tell him that this is the way of things, that it is how they should be, how things are meant to be. He wants it, and he is a man who usually gets exactly that.

Will makes a high pitched sound as he gets close, somewhere between a gasp and a whine. Hannibal has to focus so hard on not thrusting as deep as his body tells him to. He might have almost missed Will's orgasm, but then his hole is pulsing and quivering around the top of Hannibal's dick and it feels *good*. Hannibal loses his rhythm, both with his hand and his hips. He watches Will's face as he comes, and though he logically knows it objectively couldn't be the most beautiful thing he's ever seen, he doesn't care. It *is*.

He comes then, his full knot rubbing against the outside of Will's body, the rest of his cock inside. He lets go of Will's cock, hears Will's soft noises and he drops his weight to his arms. He wants to collapse onto Will, pin him down as an alpha would his omega. He wants to stay inside. He wants to lick over the bites he should have been able to place on Will's neck. He wants to stake his claim loud and clear and let the world know that Will is his. The other omegas he's slept with have never prompted this response. That should scare him. It doesn't. This feels too right that Will should be his. The only thing wrong with this picture is the fact that they have not bonded. *Yet*, he tells himself.

He pulls himself out of Will's open wet hole, holding onto the base of the condom. Will was very slick; there's a dark wet patch underneath him. It makes Hannibal smile rather than frown at the issues the dry cleaner might raise.

Hannibal stands and parts from the close proximity with Will that his body wants. His knot is still uncomfortably full and without a warm hole to release itself inside. He does not like how

the air feels against the taut flesh.

He wants, so badly, to go to the bed and wrap himself around Will and enjoy this closeness that they have shared. He wants to press his skin against Will's and enjoy the contact of Will's flesh against his own. He must be logical, and calm. He tells himself this in the hope that he can ignore the instinctual desires that gnaw at him, harder now that Will's scent mixes with the smell of sex in the air.

He wipes himself down quickly and returns with the cloth to do the same for Will, as clinically as he can. He pauses at Will's hole, wet and open. He considers the light dusting of hair and thinks how lovely that area is going to look once Will removes it. He shakes his head and forces himself to turn and leave the cloth in the bathroom.

He returns to a tired looking Will, propped up on the bed and watching him. Hannibal cannot read his expression and that concerns him. He does not like being unable to gauge the situation like this.

"I hope that was, enjoyable, for you," offers Hannibal as he steps closer and pulls at the quilt. Will gets up and moves to his side, allowing Hannibal to turn down the bed.

"Thank you," says Will softly. He rests a hesitant hand on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal turns to look at him and Will smiles. "You made it feel like...you made it a choice," Will says and Hannibal nods, though the significance of the words don't sink in.

They get under the covers and Hannibal is relieved that Will is going to stay. Will even cuddles close and presses his body against Hannibal's side. Hannibal puts his arm around him and marvels at the sensation of having another body so close when he truly *feels* something for the person in that body. It is a new experience.

Will dozes and falls asleep quickly, sniffing occasionally in his sleep. Hannibal runs his hand along Will's arm, listening to his breathing, and he is comforted but does not fall asleep for quite some time after Will has nodded off. He has a lot on his mind, a lot to think about and to plan, and yet it all means nothing. He has fallen for this omega, and it's all Will's decision to make.

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

> Oops, no chapter yesterday, I was too busy posting another fic. Well, here you go! We're nearing the end!
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will's world is changing and he can sense it. Perhaps sleeping with Hannibal had been a mistake. It is wrong to tease himself with the beginnings of something he's too proud to admit he wants. He is proud, he recognises that in himself. He sees it when they wake together and Hannibal smiles at him and his stomach feels so strange.

When Hannibal invites him into the shower, he goes, despite himself. They wash and Will's hands are far more forward on Hannibal's skin than Hannibal's are on his own. It frustrates him. He wants Hannibal to push him against the wall and take him, by force perhaps. He wants it, but the thought makes him rage inside against what his stupid biology is telling him to want. *He doesn't* really *want that, he tells himself. He's above that, he's better than that. He doesn't want to just be some alpha's property, even if the thought stirs something dark and lustful inside him.*

Hannibal dries Will's hair with a towel and smiles at him and can't seem to resist leaving tiny kisses along his face and bare shoulders. It all tells him that this is perhaps more than simply sex as far as Hannibal is concerned – the thought should terrify him but merely makes him feel uncomfortable. This was supposed to be easy, he was supposed to *get it out of his system* as Alana had put it. It anything, Hannibal is further inside him now than ever before.

Will dresses in his discarded clothes and goes downstairs ahead of Hannibal. He hovers in the hallway, uncertain of what he should do now. He should leave. He should stay. He does not know what he wants to do. There's part of him now that wants to spend as much time as possible in Hannibal's company, the same part that hopes to repeat what happened last night. There's another part that is terrified of the idea, that tells him to make his excuses and go home and play with his dogs and forget about everything else. That voice simply isn't loud enough to drown out anything though.

Hannibal comes down the stairs dressed in a shirt and sweater, and it's just about as casual as Will thinks he's capable of dressing. Will wonders for a moment how soft Hannibal's no doubt expensive sweater is; he reaches a hand out to Hannibal's arm and runs his fingers along the fabric before he can stop himself. It is soft and Hannibal's lips are soft too, when they press against his own.

Hannibal makes him breakfast and they eat together. It's quiet and Will feels as though he should feel peaceful and relaxed. The thoughts running through his head urge him to leave, to spend time alone with them and come to some conclusion about all of this.

"I hope you're not feeling regrets," says Hannibal. Will pokes at his eggs and looks up from his plate. Hannibal looks thoughtful, though not worried.

"I enjoyed it," says Will. He says it with the kind of finality that he hopes his own mind will understand. He needs to stop doubting what his own senses have told him. "The only thing I regret is that we didn't do it sooner." He smiles at his own boldness and looks down at his plate. He takes another mouthful of eggs and imagines Hannibal cooking for him every day. Hannibal would make a far better house-omega than Will ever could.

"Then that is a sentiment we both share," says Hannibal.

Will bites his lip, thinking about all the ways he wants to take whatever this is between them to a further point. It's impossible to claim that he's gotten Hannibal out of his system after one time. He wants to sleep with Hannibal again, he wants to learn and explore and *feel*. He wants to discover what that instinctual part of himself means when it tells him how good it would feel to simply *submit* to an alpha. He's too proud to say it out loud but it's clear, for the first time, he *wants* to submit.

Perhaps Hannibal feels the same way, perhaps it's torture for him to not bite Will. They both have instincts, don't they? "Did you fight against your instincts?" Will asks, the words spoken without much thought.

"Yes Will, I did," Hannibal says. He does not sound as though he's ashamed of it though, not the way Will is feeling right now. "I am an alpha after all, spending time with an omega who I am rather fond of."

"So you're *fond* of me," says Will. He puts down his fork and looks at Hannibal's face intently. Hannibal smiles at him, his gaze seems softer than it did last night.

"More than fond, Will."

Will looks down at his plate and frowns at the remnants of his eggs. "Where is this going?" Will asks, his voice quiet so he can pretend the words haven't been spoken. Hannibal hears though; he both wants him to hear and answer, and wants him to ignore them.

"Wherever you want it to go," Hannibal says and Will wants to scream. He's gone through everything wishing for control and now he's being presented with it. It's his choice, is it? He could ask for anything and Hannibal would have to grant his every request. He does not want to have to choose.

Will's silence stretches on and eventually Hannibal speaks. "Will, if you...if you wanted to *choose* me… I would like that very much. I've never wanted an omega the way I want you." The words must be hard to speak, Hannibal is clearly a braver person than Will can bring himself to be at the moment. Will nods, more to acknowledge that he's heard the words than in any kind of agreement.

”You want to own me,” Will says quietly. He looks up and Hannibal nods, once. “But it’s my choice?” he asks. Hannibal nods again. Will sighs and looks at his plate. “This is moving too fast,” he says, and it *is* but it’s also an excuse. “I need to think. I need to go home to feed my dogs and...I guess we should *talk*....” he trails off, not sure if it’s even a genuine offer to talk that he wants to put on the table. He wants to run away and hide the way he always does when his own feelings get mixed up in things. It was so much easier when it was the nightmares that gnawed so hard at him, other people’s emotions.

Will realises that he’s slept well last night, has been sleeping better. How much of it is Hannibal and how much is his growing separation from the cases? The monsters come in his dreams but they don’t frighten him, it’s almost peaceful. Now Hannibal is sitting there offering something that Will shouldn’t want but he *does*.

Will stands and thanks Hannibal for the meal all too formally. Hannibal has that thoughtful look on his face and Will wishes he could read his mind. “I would appreciate a phone call,” says Hannibal. “I agree, we should talk about all of this.” Will nods, goes and gets his coat and leaves. He only breathes a sigh of relief when he’s in his car and on the road.

Should he even be relieved? He does not enjoy leaving Hannibal but he tells himself it is merely his long denied omega instincts pressing at him and trying to sway him. Perhaps he cannot deny his nature and perhaps Hannibal is right. It doesn’t matter where the feelings have come from. He has them now – what is he going to do about them?

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

> We're in the home stretch! I hope you're continuing to enjoy this and thank you so much for your comments and kudos :)
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

He does not want to, but he gives Will his space. He wants to rush over to Will's house and drag him back. He wants to hold him down and taste him, force a heat and mate him. He is stronger than his instincts. He tells himself this over and over, though that control grows thinner with each moment that passes without Will being truly *his*.

Hannibal goes about his day and to the outside observer, perhaps he'd look perfectly normal. He runs his various errands and he takes a mental note of the people around him, but they are swiftly forgotten. His thoughts of late always seem to return to Will.

Hannibal spends his afternoon convincing himself to stay busy, but really he stays near to the phone. For every minute that it is silent, a new scenario enters his head. Perhaps he should go to Will's house, perhaps he should call him, perhaps he should go and *take*, and be firm and insistent and allow his full instincts to come out to play. His impatience leads him to distract himself. He cleans and gets a lot accomplished.

It is not a situation he has any familiarity with, or one that he in any way enjoys. He is a creature of action. He is the one who decides fates, carries out his choices and looks after his own needs and wants. For his fate to be in the hands of another, to be filled with any uncertainty at all, feels wrong and sets his whole world a little askew.

Hannibal throws himself into music, keeping the cordless phone with him and checking it frequently. He knows he'll hear if it rings, and yet he finds himself pathetically looking at the screen constantly. He plays his harpsichord and thinks of Will.

Will does not call before dinner and Hannibal begins to cook without him. He feels disappointed, but he can't quite think of what he was really hoping to happen. If Will had shown up, Hannibal doubts he would simply have thrown himself at him and begged to be mated. Though the idea of Will throwing himself at Hannibal simply for sex looks somewhat likely. He wants sex, but he wants so much *more* too. For the first time, Hannibal curses being born an alpha.

He eats in silence and solitude, something he's done countless times before, something he's *enjoyed* before. Solitude feels so lonely now, knowing that Will is out there somewhere. He itches to call him but he cannot. It is not merely pride, but knowing that the omega must come to him if he has any hope of a bond forming. He needs Will to trust him.

Hannibal washes the dishes, his sleeves rolled up and an apron protecting his suit from the water. He hears the doorbell and his heart leaps into his throat – he feels like a silly teenager might. It's all very unbecoming for someone like him to feel this way. He dries his hands quickly and forces himself to walk to the door rather than run.

Will stands there, a bag slung over his shoulder and a look of determination on his face. Hannibal manages to hold himself back from doing something foolish. He steps aside and allows Will to enter.

They move in silence, neither wishing to be the first to speak. Will drops his bag on the floor by the door, and shrugs off his coat. He hangs it up with a familiarity that Hannibal finds oddly comforting. This is where Will belongs. Hannibal moves to the small sitting room and Will follows.

Hannibal sits on the low couch, at one end so Will can sit next to him. Will sits in the armchair instead, facing Hannibal. Will leans forward and rests his elbows on his thighs. He looks Hannibal in the eye and finally, he breaks the silence.

"We need to talk," he says with a firm confidence that Hannibal was not expecting. He isn't sure what exactly he has been expecting, what he should have expected. Hannibal nods.

"Yes Will, we do, about many things."

"Do you want to mate with me?" Will says. The words are sudden and as unexpected as anything else, and Hannibal resolves to stop trying to guess what Will is going to say next. Clearly he cannot predict him right now.

"Yes," Hannibal says quietly, earnestly. It is one of the truest statements he thinks he has ever made.

"I'm sorry to come so late, but I've done a lot of thinking and it comes down to that," says Will in that soft measured voice. It's unnerving, the openness gone from his face into cold calculation. "I was thinking about what you said, about our instincts, our biology." He turns and looks to the side and Hannibal watches him, curious. "There is no line, is there? I've spent my life trying to find it and define it, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter." He turns back to look at Hannibal and his eyes seem brighter with the beginnings of tears. "I...I *want* to submit to you, I want to but it's too damn hard and I...I want to spend my heat with you."

Hannibal's mouth goes dry and he swallows. The thought of Will submitting to him stirs all of his most primal instincts and interests. He feels like a true alpha in that moment.

"If we spend your heat together…." says Hannibal.

”Bonding it inevitable,” says Will, completing the thought. They regard one another and Will’s face takes on a look of pure determination. “I don’t know if I’m ready for it, if I ever will be. All I know is that I don’t want to regret not finding out.”

”You are a fascinating person Will, your omega nature is just one piece of that.” Hannibal leans forward a little and Will tilts his head and looks back at him. They hold each other’s gazes.

”I wish others could see me as a person first,” says Will softly, his voice finally losing its measured edge, his confidence slipping.

”I do as well,” says Hannibal. “Though it is *they* that miss out on the fascinating people of this world.”

They lapse back into silence for a while. Will stands up from his chair and takes a step towards the empty seat beside Hannibal. He changes his mind and sits back in the armchair. Hannibal raises his eyebrows at Will but does not make a comment. Perhaps Will does not believe he can control his hands at this moment either.

”I want to submit to you and that means bonding with you and...you’re the only one I’ve ever thought might treat me like a person first,” says Will absently. Worry slips onto his face and he suddenly looks so nervous, as though he regrets his words.

”You are a person to me Will – what fascinates me most about you is not your omega nature but your mind.” Will smiles half-heartedly at Hannibal’s words.

”I’ve spent too long feeling wrong about it, but at the end of it all, I’m an omega.” Will looks down at the floor and rubs a hand absently across the back of his neck. “I guess I’ve come to the conclusion that life is too short to worry about what everyone else thinks and...well, things would be a lot easier, wouldn’t they.”

”I’m of the belief that that particular sentiment is one we all come to eventually,” Hannibal says. “It would be foolish to deny what might make you happy based on your fears of judgment.” He does not care what the world would think of him finally bonding with an omega after so many years, he does not care about what the other society types will say. All he cares about right now is making Will his own.

”If we bond,” says Will softly, “there are things we need to agree on first.” Hannibal leans forward expectantly. “I’m keeping my dogs and – and my independence. I’m not going to become a house-omega, I think I’d go mad...the whole point is, I mean, I feel like I could trust you to just, keep things the same.”

”You wish to continue teaching?” asks Hannibal. Will nods. “Then of course you are free to do so. My only caveat is that you would not put yourself in a position of damaging your mental health by taking on *problem* cases.” Will looks up at him sharply. His eyes slide to the side and he nods in agreement.

”And my dogs?” asks Will.

”Well, I do not *like* dogs,” says Hannibal in what he hopes is a reasonable tone. Will narrows his eyes. “I won’t have them in the house, though I do have a garden. I would permit you to keep them outside, we can have a shelter built for the cold months.”

Will tilts his head to the side. “Something proper and heated?” he asks. Hannibal sighs and nods. He tells himself that Will is worth the concession of barking and dog leavings. “So I suppose that means that I’d be moving in with you,” says Will.

”Yes,” says Hannibal. “I already do not want you far from me, I imagine when we’re bonded that would be amplified, for both of us.”

Will shakes his head at first but then he nods. “Okay,” he says quietly.

Hannibal wants to ask if that’s it, if it’s all decided just like that. If this means that he has permission to fall on Will and claim him. He doesn’t dare move, he doesn’t dare *breathe*.

”So before I lose my nerve,” says Will. “Let’s just say that when my heat comes I…” he looks up at Hannibal and takes a deep breath. “*we* are going to mate…yes?”

Hannibal licks his lips and notices the spike in his heart rate. He is not accustomed to this feeling. “Yes,” he says firmly and Will smiles hesitantly. Hannibal looks to the door. “And before that time Will…” Hannibal begins.

”Before that, I have some catching up to do,” says Will. He stands then and he closes the gap between them and he lowers himself to the ground. He kneels in front of Hannibal – it’s shocking and wonderful and something he never allowed himself to picture, but it’s *perfect*. Will takes his jaw in hand and kisses Hannibal’s mouth.

”When we mate, I will submit to you, fully,” says Will firmly. Hannibal nods and pulls Will in for another kiss. He needs Will’s heat soon. He has lost his endless patience when it comes to waiting for Will to be his.

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

> The response has been so amazing! It's great to know so many of you are enjoying reading this. Thank you so much for your comments and kudos <3
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will's life finds a rhythm and routine. He spends his mornings in lectures and his mood is so good, even the new pushy alpha students can't bring him down. He wonders why he ever let them get to him so badly in the first place, and his usual private imaginings of their deaths are a little less immediate and vivid. Their attempts at dominance don't need to *mean* anything, not unless he willingly submits to them.

He meets with Alana during lunch and they talk, but Will does not bring up his impending bond. He does not care what her opinion on it might be – once it's done it will be too late for her to voice objections. He is doing this for himself, completely. It feels good to be selfish.

Alana seems to know that *something* is going on between him and Hannibal though. She smiles knowingly far too much and seems in such a good mood. Perhaps she has always been so happy, but Will could not appreciate it quite this much before. He smiles back at her and it feels good and right, like times long past when he had fewer worries.

Alana is serious when she brings up the expectations that he will return to the field and begin working for Crawford again. He shakes his head firmly at the idea. He is a good teacher, one of the best. He can simply teach and review old closed cases. He does not need to be out in the field, he does not need to bring in new demons. He has done enough for the world and there are many others who can do good now without him.

It's a nice and calm serenity that he feels when he thinks of these things now; how funny to find such a shift in his world. It is something he could grow very comfortable with, something he could learn to truly appreciate. He does not want to think that this choice has always been available to him. It has not. Hannibal is a unique alpha and Will can see that, Will knows that, he *needs* it to be true.

His day is punctuated by long periods of driving and he feels detached from his house in Wolf Trap. He had wanted to be alone when he moved out there, wanted to be isolated and not have to interact with the other humans of this planet. Yet he finds he wishes to spend more time with Hannibal. The tiny worries that flow through him, the questions over just

how well he does know Hannibal, just how well he can hope a bond to work between them, are to be ignored. He does ignore them, he has no choice, he wants to be happy so badly.

He goes to his house, feeds his dogs and plays with them; pets and hugs them and apologises for spending so much time away from home. He assures them that they'll like their new home, he'll make sure of it. He takes them for a walk in the woods and watches them scamper and stretch their legs. He smiles at how carefree they seem. When they get back to the house, Winston whines at Will, knowing the routine by now. Will grabs his things and closes the door, using his foot to keep Buster inside.

He drives to Hannibal's house and it's a relief to see his face when he opens the door. He invites Will inside and it's another relief that he's not yet bored of Will, he still wants him. Hannibal touches him and kisses him and leads him to the kitchen, and they smile and talk about how their respective days went and Hannibal cooks. It's calm and relaxed and *right*. Will talks about his inability to cook and for what must be the hundredth time, Hannibal assures him that it is his pleasure to cook for Will; he enjoys doing it and providing, and it all feels so very comforting. Hannibal wants to look after him and it's been so long since anyone wanted to do that, or Will wanted to let them.

They sit at the dining table and they eat and drink and talk and laugh, and Will doesn't even need to reflect on how relaxed he is. He simply gets to *be*. They stay up later than they perhaps should and then Hannibal leads him upstairs, shedding clothing along the way. They kiss and pet one another and it's tender, too tender, and it's sweet. Will wants Hannibal to push him, wants to be *pushed*. The time will come, he'll allow it to happen, soon. He thinks his heat can't be that far off. He's too used to dreading it to completely change his attitude to the whole thing. Logically he knows this heat will be different though.

They fuck, face to face; slow and gentle and sweet, and Hannibal kisses his lips and sometimes his neck but he doesn't bite. He shows his self restraint and he doesn't knot Will - even when he begs for it as he gets close to orgasm. Hannibal is never deep enough, never right inside where he needs him to be. He wants so much more, but he'll have to wait for that.

Hannibal takes care of him afterwards, even when Will insists he should do it, at least some of the time. Hannibal seems to take some pleasure from taking care of him though. He smiles that mysterious smile, and Will lets him wipe him down and press at his hole and tell him how beautiful he is.

Will takes the compliments at face value. He does not feel the old urge to read into every word. Hannibal thinks him beautiful and worthy of his attention, and it makes him feel good. Will sleeps deeply and does not remember his dreams.

Perhaps it is Hannibal's arms around him, Hannibal's soft bed and the scent of them both mingling in the air. Perhaps it is something else. Will does not care and it does not matter. He feels at home in Hannibal's house, in Hannibal's bed. He looks forward to their inevitable bonding. He looks forward to finally being able to let go with Hannibal. He has found peace with the idea. He does not need to feel that things are out of his control. He has chosen this path.

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Hannibal does not believe his own nose at first. It is wishful thinking, for Will's heat to be so close. Holding onto control and being perfectly gentle and tender with Will is nice in it's own way, but it's not what he *wants*.

Hannibal scents the air, thinking about Will's heat and letting go. He imagines finally giving in to instinct, *becoming* his biology, truly being free. It is an appealing picture, especially when Will tilts his head just so and swallows, and Hannibal can see the stretch of his neck, the movement in his throat. He'll react beautifully when bitten. His reflexes will kick in and he'll act the way an omega acts around their alpha. It will be glorious. The image tests Hannibal's patience.

Hannibal feels the urge to provide coupled with his own desire to consume. The man that shoves ahead of him in the store line seals his fate with his loud voice and *rudeness*. Hannibal follows him at a distance and listens carefully as he gives his details to the pharmacist he visits next. He slips away and makes his plans.

It is a shift back to old routines as he watches his carefully made plans come to perfect fruition. He enjoys it as the unique experience it is. He takes the liver and buries the body. He does not feel the need to make a statement. His desire to show off seems so much less important now. The life and the meat is what he really came here for.

He runs into Franklyn at the market as he buys the ingredients to make the perfect dish for Will that evening. Franklyn sputters and makes his apologies, and Hannibal politely asks if he's found a new psychiatrist yet. It was so nice of him to save Hannibal the trouble of finding a referral. Franklyn hasn't been his patient since not long after that night at the opera. It seems the stupid beta finally took the hint, and even his annoying drivel now cannot ruin his good mood.

Hannibal picks out the vegetables and herbs he needs to accompany the meat and he smiles when he thinks back on that night at the opera. It hadn't been real then, all a show for the benefit of those around them. How much more real and more *private* it all is now. He smiles the whole way home.

He prepares food for the days to come. He wonders how long Will's heat is going to last. He's heard all sorts of estimates and he wants to be prepared. He calls up Alana to ask her if

she's available to drop by and see to Will's dogs. She hides her surprise and uncertainty over the request well.

By the time Hannibal has sat down and poured a glass of wine, he knows it is not long before Will shall turn up at his door. The scent of his heat has been building slowly over the last few evenings and surely by now he can *feel* it. Hannibal hopes he won't be afraid, hopes he won't have second thoughts, hopes he'll still come. Hannibal just needs Will to choose him. He does not like even the slightest uncertainty.

He makes it through most of the bottle before the doorbell rings, and there's Will looking flushed and embarrassed and worried and delicious. Hannibal pulls him inside and kisses him; smells the glorious scent of Will's building heat rolling in. Will allows Hannibal to kiss and lick his neck, and the submissiveness of the gesture sends the most glorious thoughts through Hannibal's head.

He pulls back and leads Will to the dining room. There he serves him a glass of wine and leaves him to sit while Hannibal prepares their dinner. It is a break in their routine of Will watching him cook, but Hannibal fears he won't be able to concentrate on cooking everything just so if he's distracted.

He serves Will the liver and they eat, but it's hard to concentrate on the food. The sight of Will eating what Hannibal has provided for him would be beautiful enough, but his heat is growing stronger and he's flushed – a light sheen of sweat covers his forehead. Hannibal scents the air constantly, but it's not the smell of the food that he enjoys more than anything else.

"I guess you can smell it," says Will quietly. Hannibal nods. "I need to make arrangements for my dogs...I've never been away from them during my heat."

Hannibal smiles. "I've asked Alana to take care of them, just as she did while you were in the hospital, they are in good hands." He watches Will's momentary confusion turn to relief.

"If she didn't know about this before," Will says, gesturing between them, "then she certainly will now."

The food is soon forgotten and Hannibal licks his lips as he watches Will reach for his wine. "Is this something you'd prefer to move upstairs?" Will blinks at him before swallowing down more wine as if to brace himself. "I only ask," says Hannibal, "because I fear losing control if we wait much longer."

"I want you to," says Will, quiet and shy. He looks up at Hannibal from under his hair and he smiles. "I...I have something to show you." He tilts his head to the side. "And I...I'm sure, about what I said before, I'm not going to change my mind."

"What do you mean?" asks Hannibal. He stands and doesn't even bother to clear the dishes. He has more important things to think of.

"I want you to mate me, I want to...I want to *submit* to you Hannibal." Will takes a deep breath and grabs the edge of the table. "There, I said it." He laughs softly and looks up at

Hannibal with a wide and genuine smile on his face. “I want to be *yours*, I don’t want to be afraid of that happening any more.”

Hannibal takes Will’s hand, *his omega’s hand*, and he leads him up the stairs to the bedroom with more restraint than he could have guessed he would have. Will is already his in a way, deep inside. The claiming is just the last piece of a puzzle he’s been putting together for far too long.

Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

So very close to the end...anything could happen....

Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!

You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will's heat hasn't hit him fully, not quite yet, but the signs must be there. He can smell his own scent rolling off him in thick waves and his heart pounds in his chest, but he follows Hannibal calmly. He's soft and lax in his movements as Hannibal leads him into the middle of the bedroom. It feels nice – the beginnings of letting go, teetering on the edge of a precipice. He stands quietly and watches Hannibal with slightly glazed eyes; Hannibal uses his strong yet gentle hands to slowly strip his clothes from his body. Hannibal examines him and Will should probably feel embarrassed by the scrutiny but he does not. As his heat closes tighter around his body, his brain turns fuzzy and thinking becomes harder. It is easier not to think.

Hannibal smiles and runs fingertips along his hairless groin and he nods in approval. Will would blush but he's proud of the reaction, worth his awkward manipulations in the shower to have this surprise for his alpha. Hannibal kisses him and licks his neck, and Will uses all his senses to take in everything about the alpha, *his* alpha. The warm breath against the damp skin of his neck sends a shiver down him and then all at once he's too hot, the room too clammy and the air too thick. He takes a lungful of air as Hannibal's hands run over his body and every nerve ending in his skin is on fire.

Hannibal growls at Will's throat and the rumbling sound makes Will's knees weak. He can't seem to control his body any longer and he falls against Hannibal. Hannibal growls again, fingers scratching against skin on their way up his neck, and then Hannibal takes a fistful of his hair and pulls his head back. The burn on his scalp shouldn't feel good, not with the oversensitive *everything* of his heat. It does, the pain feels *right* and Will moves with it, panting and gasping and *needing*.

Hannibal moves around him to stand behind him and Will presses back, sliding his naked back against the front of Hannibal's suit. If his voice hadn't already deserted him he would beg. His world narrows down to the inside of this room, to the small patch of the floor where they stand, to *Hannibal*. He stands and leans and he does not know what to do with his hands, only that they need to do something. He hears a whine and realises it's his own throat making that noise. He *needs*, and after so many heats, the time is finally here to give in.

Hannibal pushes him and moves him; the room spins and tilts as he ends up on the bed. He drags himself across the surface, the soft fabric suddenly rough. The only surface he wants is his alpha's skin. He whines again.

Hannibal reappears then, fingers grasping his hair and pushing him down against the bed, and then he's leaning over Will, naked and hot and right there pressed against Will's back. Will arches and spreads his legs, following instinct and desire.

Will feels empty and wanting, and the void is filled with the as yet unsatisfied desire to submit, he feels things he's never truly allowed himself to feel. He whines, turns his head and exposes his neck in an instinctual display. If his vocal cords worked perhaps he'd speak but he does not need to, his movements and pheremones tell the tale clearly enough.

Will's hole feels so wet, ready for his alpha. He shifts his hips higher, arches his back more, thrusts back. He's a being of pure instinct now, his body taken over by biology, instinct and evolution. He whines at every press of Hannibal's flesh against him, only going quiet when Hannibal's weight comes to rest against him, close and heavy and comforting. Hannibal presses him down into the mattress and his hard cock rubs along the crack of Will's ass. Will holds his legs as wide as possible, his knees slip against the covers as he tries to heft himself up, get some purchase so he can *move*. Hannibal pins him down all too expertly.

Hannibal's teeth graze his neck and every nerve sings. He stills, the reaction both what his body wants and what *he* wants at that moment. He submits and Hannibal licks and sucks along the side of his neck down to that fleshy point that tingles with the need to be bitten. Teeth nip at skin and Will isn't breathing.

In his heats before, the extra sensation always led to pain and agony, to the discomfort of being alone and unwanted. Hannibal takes the flesh between his teeth and Will feels the prod of his cock lining up and he gasps. He goes limp as Hannibal's mouth closes over the pressure point – stilling his body and slowing his heart and making him feel so *calm*. The pain in the bite doesn't feel like a normal sort of hurt. It does not *hurt*. It feels like a release.

Hannibal slides inside him with little resistance, his hole open, wet and needing in his heat. Will takes his cock as deeply as Hannibal allows him to have it, and it's deep but he wants more. Hannibal slides further inside and nestles himself flush against Will's back. He releases the flesh from his teeth – Will gasps when the air hits and it *stings*, and he realises that Hannibal has broken skin.

Hannibal's hips move and he starts to fuck. He makes low growling noises near Will's ear and Will takes it. His mind shuts down completely but for registering sensation. It is a relief to finally let go, to finally stop clinging tightly to the need to control. He feels the pull and drag and stretch with each slide of Hannibal's cock, he feels Hannibal's fingers as they close around his own, he feels Hannibal's tongue against the bite wound and it feels right.

Hannibal lets go of his hand and moves to his hips. His grip is rough and he pulls Will's body up from the bed and suddenly he feels so much deeper. Will pants and gasps and takes it because it's too overwhelming to do anything else. It hurts and yet it feels good, feels so right and it's as though the pain of his previous heats makes sense now, his body punishing him for missing out on all of this glorious sensation.

Will takes it. He takes Hannibal fucking into him, each thrust deep and hard and with purpose. He takes the bruising grip of hands on hips and he takes the sting of the wound at his neck. He takes it and the sensations wash over him, grounding and sexual and *right*. He's hard and wanting and so close and he comes with Hannibal's dick deep inside him, his body contracting and pulling and spurting. It's messy and dirty and exactly how it is supposed to be.

Hannibal's dick is big inside him, too big and tight and with every moment his knot fills further until he can't even thrust his hips any more. Will tries to arch his spine – there's a tugging and stretching sensation and he whines but he takes it. Hannibal leans over him and he closes his teeth on Will's neck again; it stings harder and it hurts even more but it's good and right that he should do it this way.

Hannibal bites, coming inside Will, pushing himself deep and his knot locking them together. For a moment they are one being, joined by flesh and something deeper. Will feels as though he's coming again but he's not even sure *what* he feels both physically and emotionally right now. Everything is bright and painful and beautiful and wonderful and the way it should be. He gives in and he submits. He is Hannibal's.

They stay joined, both locked together physically and joined by their newly forming bond. They cuddle close and Hannibal pets his hair and whispers in Will's ear but he is beyond comprehending speech. He enjoys the feeling of his alpha close by, holding him, inside and out. He feels more comfortable than he has memory of ever being. The pieces are fitting together and the picture is a beautiful one.

The knot releases and Will whines at the absence of Hannibal, but then he's there, growling and scenting him, rubbing his chest against Will's back and licking at his neck and soon they're fucking again. Their bodies need each other, *they* need each other.

They are lost in one another and they embrace it. Will moves where Hannibal puts him and takes what Hannibal gives him. There is a freedom in this submission that he never believed possible. The heat does not scratch at his insides, does not ache as it did before. Though when Will thinks about it later, he will reflect that perhaps it did, he simply never had an outlet for it.

They fuck endlessly and Hannibal holds him close, protects him and cuddles him tightly when they sleep. Will is relaxed and taken care of. Hannibal ventures out of the room and brings him food and pets his hair and watches over him. Hannibal carries him to the shower when they're too sweaty and he bathes Will tenderly and carefully. Will doesn't think he could ever have dreamed he could feel so cared for.

In his more lucid moments, he vaguely considers how he can give back, how he should repay Hannibal for his care. He takes what he is given and without putting it into words feels the urge to give up something in return but he can't quite figure it out, can't see beyond the borders of his own body, not yet. He is glad this will not be the last time, that he will have plenty of time to figure out his place in this.

By the time Will's heat has started to clear, the earliest bruises have begun to fade. It has been a long heat, exhausting and yet he feels full of energy as though recharged. He smiles at

Hannibal and Hannibal smiles back. They don’t need to talk. Now that the bond is forming, they can feel it, a sense of calmness. Hannibal holds his hand, strokes his hair and kisses his neck over the healing marks there. Will smiles and he feels happy.

He still feels like himself, but a version who is satiated and calm. He is a version of himself who does not feel as though anything could upset him right now. He is a version of himself who is happy that this was a freely made choice.

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

> Don't get too comfortable now ;) My awesome beta geneticallydead has finished betaing this now so the last 2 chapters (after this one) will arrive over the course of this weekend!
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

It is a relief, to have Will bonded to him. Hannibal feels his old sense of serenity. The knowledge that things are as they should be has returned to him and the world makes sense. Will is his now and he knows he is going to cherish this new possession.

He cooks Will his first proper meal in close to a week and watches him eat it with fondness. Will does not even blush under the scrutiny. Will is different now, not just the subtle shift in his scent, but in the way he looks at Hannibal. The shyness and the way his gaze skittered about the room is gone. Will sits in a way that says he is exactly where he is supposed to be. Hannibal does not want to let him go. He wants to keep Will close and take everything he has to offer and then some more. He looks forward to teaching Will, to having Will explore his own sexual nature and the nature of their bond.

Hannibal does not want to leave their little bubble but they must. He must confirm appointments, must go back to his life. He has sheets to launder. Will has a life too, one that Hannibal does not want him to go back to. He wants Will to be here waiting for him when he gets home.

Will is clearly sore as he moves around Hannibal's kitchen. He wears one of Hannibal's sweaters and the sight brings a smile to Hannibal's lips. It seems right that he should be the one to clothe Will's body. The neck on the sweater hangs low on him and Hannibal can see the evidence of their bonding, plain on his skin. The pattern of bruising and bite wounds is beautiful. Hannibal thinks he would very much like to draw it, capture it as it is right now.

Will fidgets over his coffee and smiles when he sees Hannibal watching him. "I don't want to leave," says Will quietly. He smiles that smile again, the one that makes Hannibal want to kiss him. Now that they're mated, there's nothing stopping him. Hannibal moves around the counter and cups Will's chin and kisses him.

"You can stay here as long as you like," he says. He keeps his voice low, he does not want to disturb the tranquillity of this morning. "I'm looking forward to you being here more."

Will nods and looks away. There is still so much to settle and arrange and Hannibal can imagine the worries in Will's mind. He reaches for the phone, walking to his study and going for his collection of business cards without a second thought. Will trails behind, his cooling coffee forgotten.

When one is willing to pay as much as it takes to get something achieved quickly, people can be very accommodating. Will smiles, wider and wider until he's grinning as he listens to Hannibal's side of the phone conversation. Hannibal hangs up the phone and Will hugs him, arms reaching up around his neck – it's confident and familiar in a way Will has not been before. Their bond has made them so much closer and Hannibal thinks he could grow addicted to giving Will what he wants. He finds it odd that the thought does not worry him the way it once might have. Their bonding has changed him somehow beyond his insight.

"The contractor will be out here first thing tomorrow morning to survey my garden...and ruin it, of course," says Hannibal with a small sigh. Will beams and Hannibal knows he can't be truly upset. The presence of Will's dogs is just a cost he must pay to possess the omega, *his* omega.

Will's mood is happy and bright. He borrows the phone and calls Alana to ask her how the dogs are doing, and if she couldn't just look after them for another day. His voice hesitates in reaction to something said on the other end of the line, but Hannibal can't tell what. Once Will hangs up the phone he's back to smiling and happy. He is truly a different person.

The hormones will wear off eventually, will wear off them both. There needs to be time to settle, Hannibal knows this. He knows that it will take time to find their rhythm, figure out exactly how they both fit together.

They fit though, comfortable and perfect. As they had been knotted and spooned together, Hannibal could see that, could feel how wonderful it felt. If the time ever comes that he must kill Will, he is not going to enjoy it at all. He frowns at the thought. If the time ever comes, he will find another way.

Hannibal does not want to go, but it would be rude to cancel an appointment with such short notice. He looks at Will sitting in his kitchen, in his clothes and drinking his coffee, and he wants to stay here forever. How comfortable this room is. It had been before, but now every space with Will in it feels so much better.

Will kisses him at the doorway – for a moment Hannibal's hands are searching, touching and petting, and every part of him screams to stay and take his omega to bed. Will is tired and sore but Hannibal knows he would not resist. He has found his peace in submitting. It is torture to leave but knowing that Will is his, that he'll be here when Hannibal comes home, makes it bearable.

He drives to his office and he's happy.

Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

> The penultimate chapter. Only one left, this has been quite a journey, thanks for taking it with me!
>
> Thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for the awesome beta!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

Will explores Hannibal's house and is slightly annoyed by the lack of diverting entertainment. He finds himself in Hannibal's study and he thumbs through several impressive looking leatherbound books, but they're all rather dry texts on psychology and Will has had his fill of that sort of thing.

He tidies Hannibal's bedroom and he has to remind himself that it's *theirs* now. Their bed, their sheets. Will bundles up those soiled sheets and goes in search of Hannibal's laundry facilities.

The house is big, imposing and intimidating in its lavishness; yet with Hannibal's scent infused into every surface, it feels like home. Perhaps it is the aftermath of their bonding, but Will feels happy and light and free. It is funny that it took giving himself to another to feel this way.

After dealing with the sheets and doing some half hearted tidying, Will feels bored. He would usually go for a walk now, take his dogs to the woods, or perhaps even go fishing. He has not been fishing in a very long time. He thinks it would be nice to provide meat for their table, show Hannibal that he is still self-sufficient.

He smiles at his imagined scenario and potters around Hannibal's house. The explorations don't turn up anything of particular interest, though he wasn't exactly searching for it. As the evening rolls around and Hannibal has not returned, Will decides to go to his car and make something happen. It would be nice to be outside for a bit.

He drives to Hannibal's office and the lights are on. Will waits in the small room outside and when Hannibal's last patient leaves Will runs to him. Hannibal hugs him close and kisses him, and Will feels like a giddy teenager. It won't last, but it's fun while it's here. He rides the wave of hormones into smiles and laughter and stolen kisses.

Hannibal allows him to rumple his suit too. He does not even protest when Will shoves him down onto the couch and climbs on top to kiss him. Hannibal's hands slide along his lower

back and find that strip of skin along his spine and run along it. Will shivers and he *wants*, despite how sore and stiff his body is.

”This is a pleasant surprise,” says Hannibal and Will smiles and nods.

”I was getting bored without you,” says Will and he kisses Hannibal’s lips and tastes the warmth of his tongue sliding against his own. He pulls away to take a breath. “I know it’s still the hormones talking but I don’t care, I missed you.”

If the line between his own mind and his hormone-addled one had not been so thin he might not have come here, he might have convinced himself that his lust-fuelled thoughts and his body’s urgings don’t matter. He is glad he came to Hannibal. The office has a whole new atmosphere now and Will intends to take advantage of it.

They rub against one another and Will enjoys feeling Hannibal underneath him. He pulls away from Hannibal’s reaching kiss and smirks at him. “You missed me today?” he asks. Hannibal nods. “It was only a few hours.”

”Says the omega who came driving over here to have me just a few minutes sooner,” says Hannibal. He winks and Will can feel his face grow hot and something settle in his groin. Hannibal makes him feel things he can’t explain, and he doesn’t *need* to explain them. He simply enjoys them.

Will rolls off Hannibal and allows him to sit up. “How was work?” he asks, his voice sounding too casual to be genuine. He smiles as he walks a small circle around Hannibal’s office. “You probably wouldn’t want to talk about your patients, huh,” he says. He chuckles to himself and turns to look at Hannibal.

Hannibal sprawls on the couch and tilts his head to look at Will clearly. “My work was dull after the last few days,” Hannibal says. “I must admit I look forward to your next heat, even though I doubt it could be anywhere near as strong.” Will nods and he knows exactly what Hannibal means, but he does not need to vocalise it.

”It’s funny,” says Will. “I stayed in your house all day, and I was just as alone as I would be anywhere else but...but for once I noticed it.” Hannibal tilts his head the other way, his expression curious. “I guess I’ve never felt truly lonely, not until I had something to compare it to and...well you’re the greatest contrast to that, aren’t you.” He ducks his head and looks down at the polished wood flooring.

Hannibal gets up, and his feet come into Will’s view as he moves in tight to tilt Will’s chin up and kiss him tenderly and softly, a chaste press of lips that communicates everything Will needs to hear.

”We don’t need to be apart much,” says Hannibal. “Once the bonding hormones wear off, it will be less painful.” Will shrugs and Hannibal runs a hand through across his scalp and through his hair. Will shivers at the sensation. “As nice as this is,” says Hannibal. “We are each our own persons. This bond just makes us a team.” Will smiles at that. The words make him happy and make the world seem less unforgiving too.

Hannibal goes for his coat and Will turns off the lamps around the room for him. He pauses at the drawing of himself on Hannibal's desk and he smiles. He almost doesn't recognise the picture as himself. The Will in the drawing looks so happy and calm, so serene. The bites and blood on his neck makes him beautiful. If this is how Hannibal sees him, Will can be feel forever grateful and secure and happy with his alpha. He is beautiful.

He isn't sure why he turned the page, probably a force of habit more than any desire to see the rest of the drawings. The image on the page is strange, a medical illustration of a man impaled with many weapons.

Will cannot control his empathy, just as he cannot control the regularity of his heats or the flowing of a tide. He cannot control how deep inside Hannibal already is. He cannot control the connections his mind makes, pieces slipping together and slotting into place. He looks up and Hannibal is standing by the door, waiting for him, waiting to take him home. Will glances once more at the drawing and swallows.

The case has not been in his mind in so long, the pictures in Beverly's file haven't haunted him, the feathered stag hasn't been stalking him in any kind of threatening manner. Perhaps this is why. He can't explain how he made the connections any more than he can explain the way his mouth goes dry at the realisation.

Hannibal is a monster and Will has just bonded with him.

Will looks at Hannibal again and he makes a gesture for them to leave. Will goes with him and he gets into his own car and he follows Hannibal home, to *their* home. He cannot choose that his mind has made this clear to him, has no choice over whether or not he wanted to see the connection. The only choice he has now is what to do about it.

Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

> Writing this, posting it, and seeing everyone enjoy this fic has been an amazing journey. Thank you so much to everyone who left me a comment or let me know their thoughts. There will be other fics and more stories, don't worry about that! But for now, here it is, the last chapter.
>
> As always, thank you GeneticallyDead/GeneticallyDead for everything, you did an amazing job betaing this fic!
>
> You can contact me on tumblr at sugarmaus and on twitter @ThisMouse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is subdued and distracted when they enter the house. It's quiet and Hannibal's attempts at small talk don't make much of a dent in the lack of atmosphere. He moves to the kitchen and begins pulling out ingredients to cook.

As he prepares their dinner, he thinks back to Will's expression as he had looked at Hannibal's rendering of him. He seemed happy, touched even. Hannibal feels happy that Will can see what Hannibal sees in him. His beauty in submission is something to be proud of.

Will does not watch him cook. He tells Hannibal that he'll meet him in the dining room and he disappears with a glass of wine. Hannibal frowns but continues his preparations. He considers what might be affecting Will but it takes a little too long for his own connections to fall into place.

Perhaps he is affected by the bond more than he thought, perhaps it has affected his ability to see the pieces as clearly as Will apparently can. Hannibal hadn't been sure if Will knew of his wound man display. It doesn't matter now, he has seen it, he has suspicions enough that he can begin to look for more connections. Will is smart. It would only be a matter of time until he has enough evidence gathered.

Hannibal grips his knife just a little tighter as he slices the meat. The steel slides through the pink flesh and he looks at how it parts intently. Killing people and killing pigs, one and the same. Will is no pig though, no ordinary person. Will is *his* and he does not wish to destroy him.

Hannibal cooks, and more and more outlandish scenarios come to him. The final result of all are unacceptable. As much as he values Will's life, he does not intend to allow himself to die instead. He will accept nothing less than continuing on with his omega by his side.

Hannibal carries the plates into the dining room and Will has lit a single candle. The table is sparse and there is nothing between them, nothing to block the view as they look into one another's eyes.

Something flickers in Will's eyes and Hannibal wonders if it's recognition, another piece of the puzzle falling together. Will drinks from his wineglass and looks steadily at Hannibal.

"Do you remember what the first thing you said to me was?" Will asks.

The scene is burned irrevocably into Hannibal's memory. "I asked you to call me Hannibal," he says with confidence. Will shakes his head.

"Not with Crawford, I mean properly, the first time it was just the two of us." Hannibal narrows his eyes.

"Our breakfast at your motel," says Hannibal. Will nods. Hannibal had been somewhat distracted by Will's state of dress so the visuals of that particular scene stand out much clearer than the audio of the memory. "I assume you mean after I explained my presence there," says Hannibal. Will nods again, his face calm and neutral. Hannibal's eyes narrow as he runs through their conversation in his mind. His stomach drops as he remembers Will's insistence that he was not a broken omega in need to an alpha. Does Will mean he is not necessary?

He must take too long because Will begins speaking, the words coming quickly. "I told you I wasn't broken. I'm not broken." He says the words firmly. "And you told me I had a knack for monsters."

The words are out of sequence, Will's memory of the day less crystal clear than Hannibal's. He nods. "And do you?" asks Hannibal. "Do you have a knack for monsters?"

"It seems I do," says Will and he takes another swallow of wine. "Funny that, perhaps monsters simply need one another."

Will begins to eat and Hannibal watches him, his own appetite having deserted him. He isn't sure what this game that Will has begun to play is. He does not like it, he needs to be in control and this is something that he does *not* control in any capacity. It is a clichéd moment to think how the tables have surely turned.

"You know," says Will, after chewing and swallowing his mouthful. "If I had to pick the one thing that I took away from therapy, the one thing that really *helped* me…." He takes another bite and Hannibal holds his breath. He does not like being in this tormented suspense.

"I'd have to say the idea that we always have a choice is the big one," says Will. He slices another piece of meat and slides it into his mouth. He looks Hannibal in the eye and it's not challenging. He is simply an omega looking into the eyes of his alpha. He smiles. "You were right, sometimes we have to just choose to be happy."

"Do I make you happy?" asks Hannibal and Will's eyes slide shut. He chews and swallows.

”Yes,” he says quietly. “You do.” He opens his eyes and looks at Hannibal. “And I make you happy?” Hannibal nods. Will smiles. “And beyond that, I think it is best not to ask questions I don’t really want the answer to…especially if I’m not ready to hear those answers.”

”Are you ever going to be ready?” asks Hannibal and he holds his breath as Will looks at him face calm and serene and smiling.

”Yes,” Will says and Hannibal feels a smile creep onto his own lips at Will’s happy expression. “We have much in common, things we may one day wish to discuss. I have parts of myself that...that I believe it would be nice to choose to explore, on my own terms.”

Hannibal’s confusion must show on his face because Will tilts his head a little and puts down his cutlery. “You’re my mate now,” Will says. “But there is still so much of each other to know, to see and understand.” Hannibal nods and Will smiles reassuringly. “When I’m ready, I will share myself with you Hannibal, you’ll be the first person in the world to truly see me.”

Hannibal nods and his voice is nearly gone when he manages to speak. “When you’re ready to share yourself, I shall be ready to share my secrets with you.” The thought is terrifying and yet comforting, to know that Will and he could grow that close, one day.

Maybe Will could betray him, maybe whatever is growing between them will put Hannibal in danger. Yet he knows he does not want to engage the possibility. There are questions to which he too does not wish to know the answers. It is happier to consider a future with Will by his side, his equal, his *partner*.

Will has changed him, deeply, on more than a simple biological level. Perhaps Will is special enough that Hannibal will grow to love him, if he is still capable on some level of *love*, if what he feels is not exactly that already. He knows now that if that happens, it will not be his decision to make. The things he once thought he freely chose are clearly much farther outside of his control than he thought, but perhaps he can find a peace in that.

The End

Chapter End Notes

If you'd like to hear about what else I'm writing, talk to me about my current works or future fics or just generally like to say hi, you can follow me on twitter @ThisMouse or on tumblr at sugarmaus. Thank you so much for your comments and feedback, you've all encouraged me so much to continue writing and creating. I hope you enjoyed this story!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!